

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG READING  
COMPREHENSION, READER SELF-CONCEPT,  
READING ATTITUDE, CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS  
OF PARENTAL AND PEER EXPECTATIONS, GENDER  
AND GRADE IN HIGH ABILITY ELEMENTARY LEVEL  
LANGUAGE ARTS STUDENTS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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GINA M. PINK









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GENDER AND GRADE  
IN HIGH ABILITY ELEMENTARY LEVEL LANGUAGE ARTS STUDENTS

BY  
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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Education

Faculty of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
July 1996

St John's

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ISBN 0-612-17634-7

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## Abstract

This study investigated the relationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, gender and grades in high ability elementary level language arts students. The purposes of the study were to provide insights to teachers about high ability students in their classrooms and to contribute to the field of research about reader self-concept.

The testing instruments used in this study were the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, to measure reading attitude, and the Reader Self-Perception Scale, to measure reader self-perception. Students included in this study had previously completed the reading comprehension subtest of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills.

This study was conducted with 74 high ability language arts students in grades 4, 5 and 6. Thirty-six boys and 38 girls participated in the study. The students were involved in enrichment programs in 5 urban Newfoundland schools. Regular correlational analyses using the Pearson Product-Moment Method were performed to examine the relationships among measures of reader self-perception, reading attitude, reading comprehension and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations. Analyses of variance were used to determine the influence of gender on reader self-perception, reading attitude, reading comprehension and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations. Spearman coefficient correlational tests were used with grade level and reader self-perception, reading attitude, reading comprehension and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations.

not identified. Link (1984) concluded that "a child's attitude toward reading affects his/her reading interest, and reading interests affect the child's reading habits" (p. 21).

This study did not find a significant relationship between reading comprehension and gender, although the mean average for girls was slightly higher. Most studies reviewed demonstrated a relationship between gender and reading achievement that appears to follow the normal patterns of growth and development for boys and girls. Girls tend to show academic superiority to boys, particularly in the language based areas, in primary and elementary school (Finn, Dulberg, and Reis, 1979; Gates, 1961; Maccoby, 1976; Ostling, 1992; Wallberg and Tsai, 1985). This study, however, is corroborated by four other Newfoundland studies that have shown no relationship between gender and reading comprehension (Brown, 1992; Byrne, 1993; Legge, 1994; Whiteway, 1995), although large scale provincial results have shown a difference in reading comprehension favouring girls.

Preston (1962) suggested that cultural and environmental factors rather than biological principles accounted for sex differences in reading achievement. Finn, Dulberg and Reis (1979) proposed that modeling, particularly by teachers, has a strong influence on reading superiority by either gender. Expectation is also a factor. Both teachers and parents expect girls to do better in school in the elementary grades, especially in language arts, and this results in higher performance in this area (Parsons, Adler and Kaczala, 1982).

For this group of elementary level high ability language arts students, statistically significant relationships were found between:

1. reading attitude and reader self-perception.
2. parental expectations and reader self-perception.
3. parental expectations and reading attitude.
4. peer expectations and reader self-perception.
5. peer expectations and reading attitude.

For this group of high achieving students, the following relationships were not statistically significant:

1. reading comprehension and reader self-perception.
2. reading comprehension and reading attitude.
3. parental expectations and reading comprehension.
4. peer expectations and reading comprehension.
5. gender and reading comprehension.
6. gender and reader self-perception.
7. gender and reading attitude.
8. gender and parental expectations.
9. gender and peer expectations.
10. grade and reading comprehension.
11. grade and reader self-perception.
12. grade and reading attitude.
13. grade and parental expectations.

14. grade and peer expectations.

The finding of a relationship between reader self-perception and reading attitude indicates that it is important that students be encouraged to feel good about reading and their reading performances with experiences of success and reward. Perceptions of parental and peer expectations are important to the development of reader self-perception and reading attitude.

## Acknowledgements

It is with sincere gratitude and appreciation that I acknowledge those who have helped in the completion of this thesis.

I wish to thank Dr. Joan Oldford-Matchim, my thesis supervisor, for her guidance, expertise and support. I also thank Dr. Marc Glassman for his comments and suggestions. Many thanks to Mr. Gerry White for his help and advice in analyzing the statistical data

I also thank the Avalon Consolidated School Board and school principals for granting me permission to carry out this study, and enrichment teachers Sharon Whalen, Wendy Batten and Donna Kilfoil for their cooperation in administering the surveys to students. Sincere appreciation is also extended to Mr. Frank Lee, Associate Superintendent, for his encouragement with this project.

To my husband, Steven, I extend my deepest gratitude and love for his encouragement and patience throughout my graduate studies. Undoubtedly, his support contributed greatly to the completion of this thesis. Our daughter Stephanie and our expected child have provided the inspiration to contribute to the field of reading. I also recognize with appreciation my mother, Ilena Pearl Twohig, and my late father, Charles Raymond Twohig, for the value they placed on education and the efforts they made to ensure I had so many opportunities.

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## Chapter I

### An Introduction to the Study

Children's perceptions of themselves as readers have long been considered to have an effect on reading performance (Teale, 1983). Many theories about the relationship between reader self-concept and performance, particularly its origins, impact on development, and use in predictions of reading success, have been developed and explored. However, self-concept in general does not lend easily to accurate measurement for a number of reasons. Firstly, self-concept cannot be directly observed, therefore, observation of behaviours and self-report strategies provide the basis for study and evaluation. Secondly, like all other constructs in the affective domain, self-concept is not well defined, nor is it easy to develop and validate instruments to measure and evaluate it.

Numerous theories about the relationship of self-concept to reading performance have existed in both the folklore and research of teaching. It has been posited that the ways in which students view themselves are often related to reading achievement (Goodman, 1996, Vereen, 1980). Attitude toward reading has also been shown to

influence performance (McKenna and Kear, 1990; McWilliams and McWilliams, 1976). Research supports the belief that students who feel good about themselves and their achievements tend to do better in reading, as well as in all aspects of academic performance. Conversely, students who see themselves as inadequate tend to do poorly (Combs, 1962; Ford, 1992; Teale, 1983; Wirth, 1966). Most teachers are aware that achievement is built on past success and design classroom activities and lessons to reflect this belief (Purkey, 1970). Some researchers indicate that the affective domain is as important as the cognitive domain in learning to read (Deeds, 1981; Elly, 1992). Children's self-concepts, and particularly their perceptions of themselves as readers, influence the success that they will encounter with reading.

### Statement of the Problem

#### Background to the Study

Children who are involved in elementary school enrichment programs for language arts have high levels of reading comprehension. Screening test scores must indicate strengths in reading comprehension and vocabulary for children to be included in the talent pool for such programs. Teacher recommendation is also considered and teachers most frequently nominate students who complete language arts assignments with ease. It is usually assumed that these students read well, enjoy reading, and feel good about their reading performances.

Studies investigating the relationships among reading attitudes, various self-concepts, and achievement have been conducted at different grade levels (Brown 1992; Byrne, 1993; Legge, 1994; Singh, 1972), as well as multigrade studies examining the roles of gender (Johnson, 1964; Wallbrown, Levine, and Engin, 1981) and socio-economic status (Amato and Ochiltree, 1986; Maruyama, Rubin and Kingsbury, 1981). A large body of work exists examining the role of self-concept in reading with learning disabled and remedial readers (Thomas and Hartley, 1980; Vereen, 1980). However, this study examined a very specific group, high ability students enrolled in enrichment programs, and investigated the interrelationships among their reader self-concepts, reading attitudes, reading comprehension, gender and grade levels. Although a number of researchers demonstrate that there are relationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude and reading achievement (Briggs 1987; Claytor, 1979; Corroero and Turner, 1985; Kennedy and Halinski, 1978; Revicki, 1980; Vereen, 1980), very few specifically have examined high ability students in reading and language arts. The belief that high ability students have positive attitudes toward reading may or may not be supported by research (Brown, 1992; Whiteway 1994; Woodlands and Wong, 1979). This study examined both reading attitudes and reader self-concepts of high ability students, thereby contributing to the body of research in this field. High ability children's perceptions of peer and parental expectations were also examined in this study.



### Purposes of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationships among reader self-perceptions, reading attitudes, reading comprehension, gender and grades in elementary level language arts enrichment students. The particular aspect of self-concept to be studied is perception of self as reader. The sub-categories of reader self-perception to be studied are those identified by the Reader Self-Perception Scale (1995): social feedback, physiological states, observational comparison and progress. Children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations are included in these sub-categories. This study's findings should provide insights to teachers about high ability students in their classrooms. The findings should also provide further information about reader self-concept at the elementary level. As well, the findings should demonstrate the value of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (1995) as a tool for classroom teachers.

The specific questions to be addressed are

1. Are there relationships among children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension scores in high ability elementary level language arts students?
2. Do male high ability students differ from female high ability students in their perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension?
3. Is there a difference in children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension between

high ability students enrolled in different grade levels?

### Definitions of Key Terms

**Self-concept:** This refers to a person's perceptions of him or herself. Self-concepts are formed through experience with and interpretations of one's environment and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attributions for one's own behaviours (Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton, 1976, as cited by Shavelson and Bolus, 1982 p. 3).

**Reader Self-concept:** One's evaluation of "self as a reader" (Valencia, 1990). Reader self-perception, a social learning theory term, is used interchangeably with reader self-concept.

**Attitude:** A predisposition to react specifically toward an object or value which is usually accompanied by feelings and emotions (Good, 1973, p. 49).

**Reading Attitude:** A state of mind which is accompanied by feelings and emotions that make reading more or less probable (Smith, 1990).

**Recreational Reading Attitude:** This refers to the attitude that students have toward reading for the purpose of enjoyment (McKenna and Kear, 1990).

**Academic Reading Attitude:** This refers to the attitude that students have toward reading for the purpose of learning (McKenna and Kear, 1990).

**Full-scale Reading Attitude:** This refers to an attitude score which is the composite score of both recreational and academic reading scores on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna and Kear, 1990).

**Significant Others:** Those people important in an individual's life whose reactions and interactions indicate to the individual whether he is liked or disliked, accepted or rejected, successful or unsuccessful, worthy or unworthy. Perceptions that are formed from the opinions of significant others determine the child's self-concept (Saracho, 1980)

**Reading Comprehension.** Reading comprehension refers specifically to the process of acquiring meaning from text. It is frequently used as a measure of reading ability.

**Affective Concerns:** Attitudes, along with interest, motivation, locus of control, feelings, and emotions that are important to the reading process because they provide the desire and the will to learn (Alexander and Fillier, 1976).

**Reader Self-efficacy:** A psychological construct defined as "a person's judgments of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this perception has on the on-going and future conduct of the activity." (Henk and Melnick, 1995, p. 471). Self perceptions are likely to either motivate or inhibit learning (Bandura, 1982, 1977; Henk and Melnick, 1995; Schunk, 1983a, 1983b, 1982; and Zimmerman and Ringle, 1981).

**Reader Self-efficacy model:** This model predicts that individuals take four basic factors into account when estimating their capabilities as a reader: performance, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states (Henk and Melnick, 1995).

**Progress:** The first category in the reader self-efficacy model, redefined from Performance. It refers to how one's perception of present reading performance compares with past performance (Henk and Melnick, 1995).

**Observational Comparison:** The second category in the reader self-efficacy model. It refers to how a child perceives her or his reading performance compares with the performance of classmates (Henk and Melnick, 1995).

**Social Feedback:** The third category in the reader self-efficacy model. It includes direct or

indirect input about reading from teachers, classmates, and people in the child's family (Henk and Melnick, 1995).

**Physiological States:** The fourth category in the reader self-efficacy model. It includes the internal feelings the child experiences during reading (Henk and Melnick, 1995).

**High ability students:** For the purposes of this study, high ability students are defined as those who have scores in or above the eightieth percentile on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills. These students are frequently referred to as high achievers, exceptionally able, gifted or talented.

#### Significance of the Study

If strong relationships are found to exist among high ability students' reader self-concepts, reading attitudes and reading achievement, the information gained could have two specific implications for classroom teachers. Firstly, it could serve as encouragement for teachers to search out and provide high ability students with reading materials suited to their abilities and interests. Secondly, it could provide information about some of the contributing factors to strong reader self-concept which may be of value for the teaching of all students. Such knowledge could help enhance the performance of teachers working with students in the schools. Finally, this study will contribute to the body of research about high ability students and to the field of knowledge about reader self-concept in

general.

There are also implications of significance for parents as well. It is frequently assumed that because children do well in a particular area, they feel competent and enjoy working in that area. This may or may not be supported by research evidence. An increased awareness of children's self-concepts would be beneficial to parents of children who are involved in enrichment programs.

#### Limitations of the Study

1. The study was conducted with high ability elementary students in one school district. Results may or may not be generalizable to other high ability students because the definition of high ability is determined by individual boards.
2. There are questions about the reliability of self-report instruments. It is not known if students are always able to answer positively, or if they understand each question as it was meant to be understood by the developers (Cook, 1988)
3. There are many factors in children's backgrounds of experience which influence their self-concepts and are not measurable (Vereen, 1980).

## Chapter II

### Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the relationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, gender and grade in elementary language arts enrichment students. Much of the research in the area of self-concept uses the same terminology for key terms, such as attitude, expectations, and perceptions. However, The Reader Self-Perception Scale (1995), one of the instruments used in this study, is quite new and uses different terms to describe these constructs. Some notable examples include: self-efficacy as perceptions of self or self-concept; progress as perceptions of self as reader, physiological states as emotional response or attitude; social feedback as child's concept of expectations of others; and observational comparison as perceptions of self as reader. Although the definitions of each may vary slightly, there is enough similarity to relate them to the terminology used in the current literature.

## Self-concept

### Historical Perspective on Self-concept

William James developed one of the most detailed and influential theoretical analysis of the self (Damon & Hart, 1982). He saw the self as divided into two main components, the "Me" and the "I".

"The "Me" is the sum total of all a person can call his (sic)" (James, 1890, p. 44)

The constituents, or primary elements, of the "Me" are the actual qualities that define the self, including all material, social, and spiritual characteristics that define the self as a unique individual. He saw a hierarchical order to these constituents, with spiritual at the top, physical at the bottom, and the material and social selves in between. Although James admitted that there could be some variation of the hierarchy in and between individuals, he did not allow for a change over time within individuals

The "I" he coined as "self-as-knower"; this is the aspect of the self that organizes and interprets experiences. According to James, this organization and interpretation is subjective and individual to each person. James identified three types of experiences: continuity, distinctness and volition. James' opinion on this theory was that psychologists interested in self-concept should focus on the "Me" and leave the "I" to philosophers.

Cooley (1902), viewed self-concept from a sociological perspective (Hattie, 1992). He did not focus on the individual's perception and ideas of him or herself, but instead proposed that self-concept is a social construct and develops from the attitudes of



significant others. He postulated that individuals are motivated to appraise the attitudes of others toward the self, and these opinions are then imitated or incorporated in one's own self-concept. Cooley termed this theory "the looking glass self" since the information one finds about him or herself is found in the reflection of significant others. Mead (1934) later developed the concept of "generalized other", which represented the collective judgements of others toward the self (Harter, 1989).

The field of self and self-concept expanded greatly throughout the 1900's. Felker (1974) defined three separate categories of theories of the self that developed during this time. The first group emphasized the psychodynamic role of personality. In this belief, personalities are dynamic energy systems operating within the individuals. Sigmund Freud was an early theorist who purported this theory. Many variations on the Freudian approach developed during the early and mid twentieth century.

The second group of theorists approached self-concept from the humanistic point of view. They believed that individuals would naturally reach for and respond for elements that contributed to personal growth and self-fulfilment. Carl Rogers and A.H. Maslow are examples of theorists in this group.

The third approach focuses primarily on the cognitive dimensions of self. Kelly's 1955 theory, named a psychology of personal constructs, emphasized the importance in which an individual views his or her world. Diggory (1966) emphasized the way individuals evaluate themselves as most important to the development of self-concept. He placed a strong emphasis on competence as an element of self-concept.

Before self-concept can be explored as a factor important to reading achievement, it must be defined. Definitions of self-concept range from very simplistic to highly complex. Dorothy Corkville-Briggs (1970) offered the general definition of self-concept as "how a person feels about himself (sic). It is his (sic) over-all judgment of himself (sic)-how much he (sic) likes his (sic) particular person" (p. 3). The definition, as well as the parameters of self-concept, are still developing. Even the name for the construct is not stable; some researchers call it self-concept while others refer to self-esteem, or one's perception of self, using the same definition.

Self-efficacy is a term used by social learning theorists. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about his or her ability to perform particular actions or attain certain goals (Bandura, 1977). Zirkel (1971) counted 15 explicit and many implicit definitions of self-concept in his review of literature about disadvantaged students.

Barbara Byrne (1984) narrowed down the definition with the following statement: "In specific terms, (self-concept) is our attitudes, feelings and knowledge about our abilities, skills, appearance and social acceptability" (p. 429). She posited self-concept to be a multi-dimensional construct. She claimed that it has one general facet and several specific facets, including academic self-concept. This definition is supported in early works in the field (Jersild, 1965; LaBenne and Greene, 1969; West and Fish, 1973). Self-concept has also been defined as one's representation of one's own personality (Kihlstrom, et al., 1988)

Winne & Marx (1981) found consensus with three aspects of self-concept:

- (a) that interaction with "significant others" strongly influences the development of one's self-concept;
- (b) that self-concept comprises at least three and sometimes four facets corresponding to how individuals view themselves in specific situations,
- (c) self-concept is non recursive.

There does not appear to be a universally accepted definition of self-concept, but there appear to be two aspects of self-concept about which most researchers agree:

1. The perceptions of self that individuals have include their views of themselves as compared to others (self-perception); and their views of how others see them (self other perception); and their views of how they wish they could be (self-ideal).
2. The perceptions of self that individuals have are largely based on the experiences they have had with those people who are important to them (significant others). Thus, such people can effect change in individuals' self-concepts. (Quandt and Selznick, 1984)

Hansford and Hattie (1982) described the literature on the self as an "ill-disciplined field". This may partly result from the nature of self-concept since it is studied in a variety of disciplines (Damon & Hart, 1982).

Damon and Hart (1982) explored the study of self-concept and concluded that self-concept research in psychology has followed a course all its own. Studying self-

concept development usually has meant studying an evaluative orientation to the self called "self-esteem". It has been approached through self-esteem because esteem is an affective orientation and can conform to a scale demonstrating negative or positive values. To study self-concept in terms of conceptual understanding would rely on descriptive accounts of individuals in their search for comprehension of self.

Discussion of self-concept, and the elements that help to create negative or positive self-concept, differ greatly between people (Epstein, 1973), indicating the evaluative aspect of the construct. Quandt and Selznick (1986) define positive self-concept as "ones in which individuals perceive themselves as capable and important and therefore, able to perform at normal or superior levels" and negative self-concept as "ones in which individuals perceive themselves as incapable or unimportant to such an extent that they are unable to perform at normal levels". It seems that self-concepts tend to remain consistent after they are formed (Lecky, 1945; Quandt & Selznick 1986; Rogers 1951). It is therefore considered a self-fulfilling prophecy for success or failure. Those who have healthy, strong self-concepts and believe they will be successful are likely to achieve success, while those who have negative, weak self-concepts are less likely to succeed. There is a large body of research supporting the belief that children with positive self-concepts perform better in school than those with negative self-concepts (Briggs, 1987; Byrne, 1986; Marsh, Smith, Barnes and Butler, 1983; Peterson, 1981; Rogers, Smith and Coleman, 1978).

### Shavelson's Model of Self-concept

Shavelson believed that self-concept is "a multifaceted, hierarchical construct" (1988). In 1976 he described self-concept as a general concept at the apex, divided in to both academic and nonacademic self-concept. His notion was that self-concept in particular academic areas, such as mathematics or English, combined to form a higher order academic self-concept. In a 1985 revision he posited that verbal and mathematic self-concepts were nearly always uncorrelated and did not form part of a single second-order academic factor. It appeared that they constituted two separate aspects of self-concept.

Shavelson and Marsh (1985) developed the Internal/External (I/E) Frame of Reference Model for self-concept. The I/E model purports that math and verbal self-concepts are formed through internal and external frames of reference. The external process includes a student's comparisons for his verbal and math abilities to his peers. The internal process involves the students comparing their self-perceived math skills and self-perceived verbal skills. According to this model, having good math skills detracts from verbal self-concept and vice versa.

### Self-efficacy Theory

The self-efficacy theory is based on the social learning theory of Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy is an individual's beliefs about his ability to perform particular actions or

attain certain goals. Research in this area supports the view of self-concept as a composition of specific beliefs about specific areas of one's life, as opposed to a global self-concept that changes with new experiences. As well, self-efficacy theory supports the assumptions that changes in self-concept can be linked to changes in effort and achievement (Gorrell, 1990).

Bandura (1977) has identified four main sources of information upon which people base their self-efficacy beliefs: performance, observational comparison, social feedback and physiological states.

Performance accomplishments, experiences of personal mastery, are the most powerful sources of personal information and lead to greater expectations of mastery and success (Bandura, 1977; Gorrell, 1990). This is supported in earlier research. Purkey (1970) attributed strong self-concept to success experiences. Bloom (1980) determined that self-concept is linked with previous achievement. Learners who experience success are more likely to continue to experience success (Hocko 1993). Henk and Melnick (1995) redefined the performance accomplishments construct specifically as progress, one's present reading performance compared with past performance.

A second element of the self-efficacy model is observational comparison. When students observe others performing tasks successfully, they raise their expectations of personal success on the same task. How they rate their own performances has an impact on their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Wagner (1983) concluded that one contributor to the development of self-concept is comparison with others. Henk and Melnick (1995)

apply this directly to reader self-concept in how a child perceives his or her reading performance to compare to the performance of classmates.

Social feedback, the third element of the self-efficacy model, includes direct or indirect input about reading from teachers, classmates and people in the child's family (Henk and Melnick, 1995). This element has been included in self-concept models for many decades. Rogers, (1951) described evaluations from culture and family as impacting on the development and change in self-concept.

Praise and encouragement from significant individuals toward students appear to have the weakest impact on self-efficacy. However, research with young children (Andrews and Debus, 1978; Schunk, 1982a) has demonstrated that feedback pertaining to effort may be effective in raising children's sense of efficacy and their eventual persistence in difficult tasks. As children get older, feedback about ability, and not effort, has more influence on self-concept (Schunk, 1983; Schunk, 1984; Schunk and Gunn, 1985; Schunk and Rice, 1984).

One particularly interesting study in the area of social feedback was done by Juliebo and Elliot (1985). In an in-depth case study of one child, they demonstrated the effects of negative feedback instead of positive feedback on the child. Negative self-concept developed in a bright, enthusiastic learner when the teacher held negative beliefs about his performance.

The fourth element of self-efficacy is emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). This serves as an indicator to an individual that he or she is not coping well with a situation

When this internal message is received, it may inhibit performance attempts because individuals tend to associate anxiety and stress as signs of incapacities. If children experience negative feelings, or feelings of stress and anxiety, while reading, they will interpret these as signs of personal incapacities and devalue themselves as readers (Bandura, 1977). Henk and Melnick (1995) defined physiological states as the internal feelings children experience while reading.

It would be expected, and has been shown in research related to school failure, that students' self-efficacy ratings tend to increase following success and decrease following failure. (Campbell & Hackett, 1986; Dunn, Wilson and Bonfilio, 1984; Hackett and Campbell, 1987; Lyman, Prentice-Dunn, Wilson and Bonfilio, 1984). As Bandura (1977) posited, self-efficacy has been shown to be positively related to achievement (Brown and Larkin, 1984; Relich, Debus and Walker, 1986).

In summary, each of the approaches to self-concept discussed in this section have added to the understanding of the role of self-concept in human behaviour and learning. James first identified the self as having different facets, facets he termed the "Me" and the "I". Cooley's looking glass theory investigated the role of other people in the development of self-concept.

Byrne and Shavelson each put forward a theory of a multi-dimensional self-concept, although each developed their theory differently. Bandura's social learning theory of perceptions of self as self-efficacy involves a multi-faceted view of people and



their interactions with significant others. All of these approaches have influenced the way reader self-concept is articulated.

### Reader Self-concept

It is not difficult to accept that a child who feels good about him or herself and his or her reading ability will become a better reader than one who does not. In 1970, William Purkey stated: "For generations, wise teachers have sensed the significant and positive relationships between a student's concept of himself (sic) and his (sic) performance in school. They believed that the students who feel good about themselves and their abilities are the ones who are most likely to succeed" (p.70). In education it has long been assumed that children's self-concepts are implicated in all that they do, including students' social relations, school performance, mental health and comfort with their place in the world in general (Damon & Hart, 1982; Jersild, 1952; Rosenberg, 1979). Educators, guidance counsellors and parents have accepted this view, as evidenced by the volumes of materials and programs aimed at increasing self-esteem in children, with improved academic performance as one of the long term goals

Specifically, reading success and lack of success has been linked to self-concept. If children develop strong positive self-concepts as readers, they will attempt more difficult material, enjoy reading and be apt to read more widely. Wide reading makes better readers (Quandt, 1986, p.5). This creates a circular effect and brings together all of the elements affecting the reader: feelings and beliefs about the self as a reader, and

perceptions of parental and peer expectations of child as reader. Children with positive feelings and beliefs will read more and thereby improve in reading ability.

What helps children to feel good about themselves and thereby develop strong and healthy self-concepts? Many factors have been researched and have shown relationship to positive self-concept. These include being accepted by a group (Rosenberg, 1966), feelings of being an effective person, a sense of having control over one's life, a willingness to take moderate risk, (Gecas, 1982; Rosenberg, 1965), and good communication with parents (Walker and Green, 1986).

Children begin school with some sense of themselves in their world. This comes from interactions with significant others, particularly parents. Children begin the first day of kindergarten with some idea about how they will perform and how others will see them (Burns, 1979). For this reason, kindergarten children have been the focus of a number of studies about self-concept and academic achievement.

Wattenberg and Clifford (1964) found that low self-concept and low performance are already established in kindergarten children. In their study of 128 children they looked at the interrelationships of intelligence, self-concept, ego-strength and reading ability. They determined that, two and one-half years later, it was self-concept and ego-strength rather than intelligence that were more predictive of reading ability. Other studies at the kindergarten level that found self-concept to be the strongest indicator of academic achievement included Briggs (1987), Trent (1986) and Correlo and Turner (1985).

The link between self-concept and performance appears to continue throughout school years. Findings of studies of children with learning disabilities and difficulties show that children with reading problems had lower self-esteem than their classmates who read without difficulty (Battle, 1982; Butkowsky and Willows, 1980; Johnson, 1981, Thomas and Hartley, 1980).

A number of studies have indicated a positive relationship between self-concept and reading achievement (Briggs, 1987; Byrne, 1986; Marsh, Smith Barnes and Butler, 1983; Peterson, 1981; Rogers, Smith and Coleman, 1978). Some researchers have explored the 'chicken and egg' aspect of the question: Which comes first--low self-concept or low academic performance, or conversely, high self-concept or high academic performance? Although no definitive conclusions have been reached, some studies give insight into this question. The following studies looked specifically at reading as a measure of academic performance.

In his 1981 study, Peterson attributed the poor reading ability of a group of Mexican American children learning to read to their poor self-concepts. Marklund and Hanse (1984) followed a group of 46 underachievers throughout their primary/elementary school years and found that poor readers had a negative self-image throughout the six years. Both studies found that improvement in reading ability led to a higher self-concept. Revicki made the same determination in his 1981 study of second grade students. Lawrence (1981) found that remedial students who participated in activities providing opportunities for increased self-esteem improved in reading. Such faith has been put in the

effect of increased self-esteem on reading ability that counselling has been used as a therapeutic approach (Cant and Spackman, 1985). There are also studies which support the position that there is no causal relationship between low achievement and low self-concept. Byrne (1986), Maruyama, Rubin and Kingsburg (1981) and McIntire and Drummond (1977), were all involved in studies that do not demonstrate any connection between the two.

Although research cannot definitively determine the existence of a cause and effect relationship between self-concept and achievement or vice versa, there are enough connections for the teacher to accept the importance of nurturing the self-concept of students in his or her classroom. Napier (1976) questioned "Do you perceive yourself as smart or not? And when did you perceive yourself that way? Chances are that your vital self-concept germinated early in your school career" (p. 234). Lawrence (1981) stated that "the child who has experienced regular failure comes to lack confidence as a person" (p 248)

Perhaps the most comprehensive approach for teachers is to consider the theory of Pottebaum, Keith and Ehly (1986). They suggest that self-concept and academic achievement may cause each other in a cyclical nature; that is, one may cause the other, but the magnitude of the effect may be too small to be detected.

### Perceptions of Self As Reader

It is known with great certainty that children who have made positive associations with reading read more often, with greater intensity, and for longer periods of time. Conversely, children who have negative associations with reading read very little or avoid reading all together, or read with little involvement (Henk and Melnick, 1995). It follows that children who demonstrate superior reading achievement read frequently (Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson, 1988; Foertsch, 1992). Since reading is such an integral part of education, and so much of a child's academic success rests on his or her ability to read well, it can be accepted that motivating students to read and creating an interest in reading among students rank high as priorities for teachers (O'Flavehan et al., 1992)

Self-perceptions can either motivate or inhibit performance in all aspects of life and school (Schunk, 1983a, 1983b, 1982; Zimmerman and Ringle, 1981). Judgements about one's ability to achieve affect actual achievement through influence on an individual's choice of activities, task avoidance, effort expenditure and goal persistence (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, Schunk, 1981). This is borne out in classroom experience when one observes the strong readers frequently making book selections and library trips, while the poorer readers show little initiative to get through assigned books. Henk and Melnick (1992) posited that "How an individual feels about him or herself as a reader could clearly influence whether reading would be sought or avoided, the amount of effort that would occur during reading, and how persistently comprehension would be pursued" (p 114)

Thomas (1984) was one of the few researchers who looked specifically at the concept of reader as self, and not at global self-concept. In her study of one hundred sixth-grade students' performances on a reading comprehension test and views of self as reader, she found a significant relationship existed between how good readers viewed their ability to read and their actual reading ability.

There have been few instruments available to look at the concept of self as reader, and all contain some notable limitations, such as few items, inadequate norming, or lack of grounding in theory (Boersma, Chapman, and MacGuire, 1979; Cohen, McDonnell and Osborn, 1989; Mitman and Lash, 1988). Henk and Melnick (1995, 1993, 1992) posited four factors of self-efficacy, that is, "a person's judgments of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this perception has on the on-going and future conduct of the activity" (1995, p. 471). They are performance, defined as progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states. These four factors can not be examined in isolation since they are very much interrelated. They must be viewed as affecting each other (Marshall and Weinstein, 1984).

#### Children's Perceptions of Parental Expectations

Children's perceptions of themselves are greatly influenced by their interactions with the significant others in their lives (Brookover and Gootlieb, 1964; Purkey, 1971; Singh, 1972). Their perceptions of the views that their significant others hold of them are formed through reactions to behaviour. According to Maehr (1969), children learn two

concepts through these reactions: their competency at tasks and their value as people. He posited that children's reactions to experiences are based more on views that people important to them appear to hold of them than upon children's success or failure with a task itself.

Undoubtedly, parents have the role of the most important significant others (Battle, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Felker, 1974; Hammachek, 1978, LaBenne and Greene, 1969; Purkey, 1970, Samuels, 1977; Silvernail, 1985) with their greatest influence exerted long before a child begins school. Parental reactions to their children's questions, play, exploration of the world, and risk-taking contribute greatly to the development of self-concept. Several researchers put considerable emphasis on the "looking glass" theory (Cooley, 1902; Gecas, Calonico and Toms, 1974). This theory purported that the appraisals of significant others greatly influence children's views of themselves. This theory supported the belief that the manner in which parents perceive and treat their children result in favourable or unfavourable self-concept.

Another view of the importance of parental influence in self-concept development is the social learning, or "modelling" theory (Bandura, 1969, Bandura, 1977, Bandura and Kupers, 1964, Bandura and Wagner, 1963). This theory purported that children imitate parental behaviour. The social learning theory suggested that a child's self-concept was positively related to parental self-concept. It follows, according to this theory, that the positive or negative treatment of children by their parents can reflect their feelings and opinions about themselves. Parents who have strong self-concepts, and accept themselves,

are more likely to accept their children, treat them warmly, and have children who then accept themselves.

Coopersmith (1967) listed three conditions which lead children to value themselves and see themselves as objects of worth: parental warmth, respectful treatment, and clearly defined limits. Authoritative, rather than authoritarian parents, tended to have children who have higher self-concepts, are self-assertive, independent, friendly with peers, and highly motivated. Warmth and caring, encouragement, some freedom for exploration, high expectations and firm discipline were cited by Hamachek (1971) as the parental qualities most likely to contribute to a strong self-concept. Felker (1974) suggested that parents influence the development of their child's self esteem in three basic ways: as primary models for the developing behaviour of the child; as primary feedback agents acknowledging how the child's behaviour is influencing others, and as the primary evaluator of the behaviour of the child (p. 44).

According to Samuels (1977) and Silvernail (1985), parents with high self-concepts are most able to provide an environment with approval and acceptance. This environment includes parental love demonstrated through warmth, supportive encouragement, realistic expectation, consistency, and reward rather than punishment.

Silvernail (1985) described the role of the parents in this way:

Unquestionably, the parental care received in the early years  
plays an enormous role in defining the child's self-image.



A supportive environment, with many stimuli and visible love and care on the part of the parents, will enhance the development of a psychologically sound and stable self-concept

An opposite environment will, in all likelihood, contribute to the development of children who are psychologically crippled (p. 12).

Amato and Ochiltree (1986) summarized a number of studies and offer this list of qualities that contribute to family environments that promote self-esteem:

1. Parents encourage the child to explore and manipulate the environment,
2. Parents talk frequently with the child;
3. Parents have a close and supportive relationship with the child,
4. Parents have high educational expectations and aspirations for the child,
5. Parents provide assistance with schoolwork,
6. Parents point out the consequences of behaviour to the child,
7. Parents use authoritative, rather than authoritarian or permissive styles of parenting;
8. Family life is relatively free of overt conflict between members (p. 48)

The role of parents in the development of children's self-concept cannot be overemphasized. Amato and Ochiltree (1986) found that the impact of parental care had a greater influence on the development of self-concept than parent income level, social status, and education.

Children form their concepts of self on a foundation provided by interactions with parents. Children also form beliefs about what their parents expect from them based on these same interactions.

A large scale study by Gigliotti and Brookover (1975) hypothesized that children's beliefs about parental expectations would be a significant factor affecting reading achievement. Their study involved questioning 1319 elementary school children about what their parents', teachers' and principals' expectations were of them as readers. The results indicated a significant, positive relationship between children's actual performance and other's expectations. Grolnick, Ryan and Deci (1991) studied the relationships among children's perceptions of parental expectations and their academic motivation and performance in school and reported similar findings to Gigliotti and Brookover (1975).

#### Children's Perception of Peer Expectations

Parents are certainly the strongest influence on the development of self-concept, but peer relations also affect the way children see themselves in the world. Children who feel loved and worthwhile as human beings will usually be successful in peer relationships, while those who do not will have more difficulty (Folger, 1974). As children move out of their home environment and into the larger world of preschool, school and social activities, they begin to value themselves based on competence with peers. If children have developed a sense of belonging and security, they will likely encounter success with their peers. A lack of sense of belonging, fearfulness, and absence of confidence will

prevent good peer relationships and result in the beginnings of a negative self-concept. As children's worlds widen, the positive or negative self worth they have assigned themselves will continue to affect their self-concept. These findings were supported in the work of several researchers with elementary school children (Carlson, 1963; Coopersmith, 1969; Richmond and White, 1971; Williams and Cole, 1968). Children with positive self-concepts were more likely to enjoy high status with their peers than children with low self-concepts.

The relationship between peer relations and self-concept can be somewhat cyclical in nature: poor peer relations will contribute to low self-concept; strong peer relations will contribute to high self-concept. Children who perceive themselves as competent and confident will have successful peer interactions and will enjoy more social encounters. They will receive acceptance from their peers (Heathers, 1955, Henderson and Long, 1971; McCandless, Bilous and Bennett, 1961). These children will enjoy high peer status (Carlson, 1963; Coopersmith, 1959; Richmond and White, 1971; Williams and Cole, 1968) and believe that people whom they like reciprocate their feelings (Simon and Bernstein, 1971).

### Gender and Self-concept

The research in the area of gender and self-concept offers conflicting results. Coopersmith (1967) found a significant correlation between gender and self-esteem, while Battle (1982) found no significant difference, with the exception of males gaining higher

self-esteem with maturity. Wylie (1979) performed an extensive review of the research and concluded that no evidence of sex differences in overall self-concept existed at any age level. She did, however, suggest that there are differences in specific components of self-concept that are lost when items are totalled to obtain a total score. The self-concept instrument being used, as well as cultural differences in socialization, must be allowed for when considering global information. Several Australian studies have demonstrated that boys have higher self-concepts than girls (Connell, Stroobant, Sinclair, Connell and Rogers, 1975; Smith 1975, 1978; as cited by Marsh, Barnes, Cairns, and Tidman, 1984). Marsh, Smith and Barnes (1985) conducted a study of various self-concept constructs with 559 fifth-grade Australian students. They concluded that girls had a higher level of reading self-concept than boys, but a lower level of math self-concept.

Within the province of Newfoundland, Brown (1992) in her study of second grade urban students found girls had a higher level of self-concept than boys, while Byrne, (1993) found no difference in a study of sixth grade rural students. Legge (1994), found no differences between reading self-concepts between second grade girls and boys in urban Newfoundland, nor did Whiteway, (1995) in her study of three classes of grade five students in an urban Newfoundland school.

The testing standards in Newfoundland for the Canadian Test of Basic Skills report a trend in differences between the performance of males and females in reading sub-tests. The 1990 testing standards for the grade 4 students in the province record a reading comprehension sub-test average of the thirty-sixth percentile for males and forty-second

percentile for females. In 1991, a comparison of grade 6 male and female students' reading scores shows a difference of 3 percentile ranks, with males averaging at the fortieth percentile while females were at the forty-third percentile. In 1993, grade 4 male students averaged at the thirty-ninth percentile while female students averaged at the forty-sixth percentile in the reading sub-test.

Teacher expectations for male and female students may also play an important role in the development of self-concept, but again the results of studies offer conflicting results. Elaugh and Harlow (1973) found that males receive more teacher attention than females, resulting in lower self-concept for females, while Samuels (1977) found that more females than males perceive their teachers' reactions to them to be positive.

Wallbrown, Levine and Englin (1981) studied fifth and sixth grade students in rural Ohio to determine the students' perceptions of themselves as readers. They found that boys are more likely to perceive themselves as having difficulty in reading and girls perceive themselves as getting more reinforcement from friends, parents and teachers in reading. Girls were also found to value reading more and get more satisfaction from it. Although there is no agreement on the roles of cultural expectations and specifically teacher expectations on gender and self-concept, it can be concluded that for some cultural settings there may be an influence of some nature and magnitude.

In summary, it appears that a number of factors are involved in the development of reader self-concept. As put forward in the above discussion, reading researchers and theorists have demonstrated that positive relationships with parents and peers have a

significant, positive effect on self-concept in general and on reader self-concept. The parent has the strongest influence on the self-concept of a child. The effects appear to be somewhat cyclical in nature: children who receive positive messages from their parents and peers tend to perform well; children who perform well tend to receive positive messages about their performances. The same is true in reverse, with negative influences. Gender has not been shown conclusively to affect reader self-concept. A number of factors contribute to the outcomes, including differential cultural expectations, teacher expectation, and developmental milestones.

#### Attitude to Reading

Attitude is similar to self-concept since it cannot be directly observed and measured. As with many other aspects of the affective domain, it must be researched through a variety of behaviours. It has been defined as "a predisposition to react specifically toward an object, situation or value which is usually accompanied by feelings and emotions. (Good, 1973, p. 49). Alexander and Filler (1976) proposed that reading attitude consists of a system of feelings related to reading. Smith (1990) defined reading attitude as "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that make reading more or less probable" (p. 215). This was supported by Thames and Reeves (1994) who developed their definition from current reading research, defining attitude as a combination of feelings and behaviours related to specific learning situations. They purported that attitudes serve as a major factor in the learner's receptivity to the learning

situation.

If reading habits are to be developed and retained after leaving school, strong positive attitudes toward reading must be developed and maintained. Link (1984) concluded that "a child's attitude toward reading affects his/her reading interest, and reading interest affects the child's reading habits (p. 21).

It appears that there is agreement that the development of positive attitudes is extremely important in the educational process, and specifically with reading. Attitude has been shown to be an important factor in reading, although neither the causality of relationship, nor the magnitude of the correlation, have been shown. Reading theorists have recently begun to emphasize the importance of the affective domain in reading education (Cramer and Castie, 1994; Fisher, 1994; Kline, 1994; McKenna, 1994; Nell, 1994;). Smith (1990) emphasized the importance of strong positive reading habits and attitudes among students but stated that more research is needed to determine ways to promote positive attitude development during the early school years.

#### Self-concept, Attitude toward Reading and Reading Achievement

Attitude toward reading is another example of the 'chicken and egg' scenario Kennedy and Halinski (1978) found a correlation between positive attitude and strong performance, and poor attitude and poor performance. Good readers were found to have more positive attitudes toward reading than poor readers (Claytor, 1979, Kennedy and Halinski, 1978; Zimmerman and Allebrand, 1965). Lewis (1980) in a study of 149 third,

fourth and fifth grade students found a positive relationship between attitude to reading and reading success, but did not find that attitude toward reading was a major factor because of the low magnitude of the correlation. It has been proposed that a child's success in school depends greatly on his or her attitude toward reading. (Bettelheim, et al; 1981; Heilman, 1972). Athey and Holmes (1976) posited that the affective traits, i.e., attitudes, values and beliefs are as important as the cognitive strategies, such as word identification and knowledge of phonics, and Alexander (1983) went so far to suggest that a positive attitude toward reading is the first prerequisite for learning to read. Dryden (1982) and Cullinan (1987) both postulated that positive attitude in the formative years will create lifelong readers. It appears that there is a relationship between reading achievement and attitude to reading, although the causality of the relationship has not been shown (Fredericks, 1982; Walberg and Tsai, 1985; Wigfield and Asher, 1984). Briggs (1987) posited that a child's self-concept impacts on both attitude and amount of effort. If teachers can help children improve their self-concepts, he suggests, they will be better able to develop positive attitudes. Brown and Briggs (1989) stated that children who develop positive attitudes toward the value of reading will approach reading instruction with a greater possibility for success.

Attitude to reading is given a lot of weight in the whole-language classrooms of today, and this belief is certainly well founded in the literature. Few, if any researchers, have questioned that attitude has a potential positive or negative affect on one's ability to read (Burns, Roe and Ross, 1988; Mathewson, 1985; Parker and Paridis, 1986).



Considering the importance that attitude toward reading has been assigned, it is curious that there are relatively few studies in the area (Cullinan, 1987). However, there is research that demonstrates a relationship between self-concept and attitude to reading. Zimmerman and Allebrand (1965), Claytor (1979) and Briggs (1987) all demonstrated a positive relationship between attitude to reading, self-concept and reading achievement. As well, a number of studies demonstrate a relationship between attitude to reading and reading achievement (Fredericks, 1982; Hall, 1978; Walberg and Tsai, 1985; Wigfield and Asher, 1984). However, none of these studies drew conclusions about causality.

There is also evidence to support the view of no relationship between attitude to reading and reading achievement. Roettger (1980) found evidence that it may be a children's perception of the need for reading, not their attitudes toward reading, that makes the difference in achievement. Lewis (1980) found that the low magnitude of correlation between attitude to reading and achievement indicated that attitude was not a major factor. Foley, Honeker, and Coriata (1984) found that most students had a positive attitude toward reading regardless of their performances on reading achievement tests. Other studies have shown that there is a low positive correlation, but this correlation is not strong enough to indicate a relationship, or that attitude can be a predictor of academic achievement. For this reason, further research needs to be conducted in this area.

Reading attitude has been shown to be an affective factor with a role to play in reading achievement. Rooney (1984) put forth the notion that children who do not view reading as both enjoyable and immediately useful will not regard it favourably. Viewing

reading as having no purpose and as not being enjoyable will interfere with, or prevent, the development of a habit of reading. This may result in a lack of motivation to read and therefore, children will not read. Brown and Briggs (1969) and Kennedy and Halinski (1978) found that good readers have more positive attitudes toward reading than do poor readers. Time spent has a direct effect on reading achievement: low achievers spend less time reading than high achievers (Allington, 1983; Anderson, et al., 1985; Winograd and Smith, 1987). Anderson, Tollefson and Gilbert (1985) noted that "What is not predictable is whether lack of proficiency in reading stems from unfavourable attitudes or whether it is the other way around. Probably, the truth can be in either direction"(p. 15).

Cramer and Castle (1994) put forward four beliefs as central to any literacy education program.

1. Affective aspects of reading are equal in importance to cognitive aspects.
2. Affective aspects of reading instruction are too often neglected.
3. Affective elements of reading can and should be measured.
4. More systematic research is needed in the affective areas of reading (p.3).

#### Age/Grade Level and Attitude

Children tend to have the most positive attitude toward reading in the early school years, with a gradual but significant decline in attitude as they proceed through the grades. It has been shown that pre-schoolers have positive attitudes toward reading but develop negative attitudes toward reading in the primary grades (Shapiro, 1979). There is little

evidence to explain why attitudes become less positive as children progress through school. Heatherington and Alexander (1984) suggest that one reason is that primary grade teachers spend little classroom time attempting to develop positive attitudes toward reading. Swanson (1982) stated that negative attitudes are established when learning to read becomes a task. Arlin (1976), Johnson (1964), and Parker (1978), supported this observation in earlier studies.

In a study at four elementary Oregon schools, Johnson (1964) found the results indicated differences in attitudes between grade levels, showing that children in lower grades hold better attitudes toward reading than children in each successively higher grade tested. Ashley (1970) found that the 10 to 11 year old range was the peak time for reading attitude and the greatest amount of reading was done during this time. He stated that interest faded during the latter half of grade six. The best time to foster good reading habits was in or before grade 4. Swanson's 1972 results indicated that younger children usually have relatively positive attitudes in the initial stages of learning to read and that negative attitudes develop when learning to read becomes a task. Bullen (1972) found a decline in reading attitude from grades 1 to 3, while Crews (1978) found grade six students to be significantly more positive than grade seven or eight students. Davis (1978) found similar results. In a review of 110 research articles concerning attitude toward reading, Davis concluded that attitudes toward reading become less positive with an increase in the age of the students. Anderson, Tollefson, and Gilbert (1985) found similar results in the self-reported behaviours of 276 gifted students in grades 1 through 12.

Primary students had the most positive attitudes and each advancing grade level had less positive mean attitudes. Parker and Paradis (1986) found evidence of an increase in reading attitude between grades 4 to 5.

Askov and Fishbach (1973) investigated the attitudes of 94 first and third grade students. In this study, grade level and attitude were not significantly related.

#### Gender and Attitude to Reading

Teaching folklore has often cited primary and elementary level girls to be stronger readers than boys of the same age and level. However, the research in the area of gender differences in relatively scanty (Byrne, 1993). The studies reviewed indicated mixed findings in the area of gender and attitude to reading.

Girls tended to show more interest and a more positive attitude toward reading than boys (Arlin, 1976; Johnson, 1964, Kennedy and Halinski, 1978; Wallbrown, Levine and Engin, 1981). However, Alexander and Fillier (1976) recommended teachers not assume that girls have more positive attitudes than boys. Crews (1978) found that girls in grades six, seven and eight reported significantly more positive attitudes toward reading than boys. Parker and Paradis (1986) found that although attitude scores for girls tended to be more positive than boys at the primary and elementary grades, the difference was only four raw points in primary and six in elementary, hardly a spread that allows for generalization. Brown (1992) found less positive reading attitudes in grade two boys than girls.

Although some research studies reported females as having more positive attitudes toward reading, some other studies reported males as having more positive attitudes toward reading. Other studies found no difference between the sexes. Therefore, teachers should not consider the sex of the child to be an indicator of reading attitude.

In summary, attitude toward reading is a fairly recent area of attention by researchers and theorists. It appears that attitude toward reading does have an impact on reader self-concept and reading achievement. However, the relationship among these factors has not been conclusively shown. Many studies indicated that students who have strong reader self-concepts tend to have positive attitudes toward reading. There were, however, a few studies that demonstrated this cannot be accepted as a generalization. Age and grade both appear to have an effect on reading attitude, with most studies showing that younger children have more positive attitudes toward reading and this attitude becomes less positive as they age and proceed through grades. As well, some studies indicated that girls have more positive reading attitudes than boys, although the degree of differences between the two sexes was questioned. With all three variables, age, grade and gender, there was no one conclusive stand found in the research. It was noted by Byrne and others that this is an area requiring a great deal of further research.

#### Reading Comprehension

Reading achievement can be measured in a number of ways: word identification, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. For the purposes of this study, reading

comprehension will serve as the measure of reading achievement. Reading comprehension is used most frequently as the measure of reading achievement in the studies cited; as well, reading comprehension is one of the subtests administered to determine eligibility for enrichment services.

Reading comprehension refers specifically to the process of acquiring meaning from text. Although there are many models to explain this process, the strategic reading model will be described here. This model emphasizes the cognitive, metacognitive motivational and affective dimensions of reading comprehension.

### Strategic Reading

Strategic readers interact with text - they have an awareness of a some control over their cognitive reading skills. Brown and Briggs (1989) have identified four characteristics of strategic readers:

- 1 They establish goals for reading.
- 2 They select reading strategies appropriate for the text.
- 3 They monitor their reading to determine whether comprehension is accurate.
- 4 They have a positive attitude toward reading (p. 31).

Paris, Wasik and Turner (1991) distinguish between reading skills and reading strategies by referring to skills as information processing techniques that are automatic and applied to text unconsciously for many reasons, such as expertise, repeated practice.

compliance with directions, luck and naive use and strategies as actions selected deliberately to achieve particular goals. Strategies are conscious and deliberate and can be evaluated for their utility, effort, and appropriateness.

Strategies are used in different situations for a variety of reasons. Prereading strategies can be applied to connect a reader's past knowledge and the text about to be read. During reading activities help the reader make information provided by the text significant to his or her own world. This includes inferencing from background knowledge and prediction. Postreading strategies are used after the text has been read and involve reflection on what has been read and whether it has met the purpose for reading

Whether or not children acquire and apply reading strategies depends on their emerging metacognition about literacy, schooling, and self. Students who have developed confidence in their abilities will apply strategies to address tasks, while those who have not developed confidence will be less likely to do so. Metacognition, knowledge of a conscious attempt to control one's own cognitive process, (Flavell, 1979) is highly developed in strong strategic readers and less developed in weaker readers

Strategic readers are able to monitor their own comprehension of text using a variety of strategies (Swanson, 1988). There is evidence that the ability to monitor comprehension grows with age (Garner and Taylor, 1982, Markman, 1979) and that it is related to the ability to recall text and organize text information (Paris and Myers, 1981). In general, strategic readers are able to monitor their own comprehension and find solutions for any difficulties they encounter with the text. Such solutions may reflect

strategies for constructing meaning, knowledge about criteria for evaluating text and coherent recall and organization of text information.

### Reading Comprehension and Self-concept

The relationship between reading comprehension and self-concept has not been clearly defined by research findings. Woodlands and Wong (1979), in a study of 180 children in grades 4 through 7 found only a "fairly" accurate prediction of a student's academic grouping could be made on the basis of self-concept scores. Chapman and McAlpine (1980) found a correlation between high academic ability and high academic self-concept, but did not find that this transferred to non-academic areas. Strain, et al. (1983) found no significant difference in self-concept scores between children rated as highly academically competent and those given a lower rating in a group of fifty-six kindergarten students. In general, the research indicated that ability does not necessarily translate into positive self-concept or high academic achievement.

### Reading Comprehension and Gender

The relationship between gender and reading achievement appears to follow the normal patterns of growth and development for boys and girls. In the primary and elementary grades, girls tend to show academic superiority to boys, particularly in language based areas, because girls mature faster than boys in the first years of life (Maccoby, 1976). Sex-role expectations from society may also contribute to this



difference in development, since society may encourage conformity and passiveness in girls and aggression in boys. Children set attainment goals according to these expectations. Thus, girls perform best in language and reading related activities, while boys perform best in math and science related activities (Whiting and Edwards, 1973). Behaviour modeling also contributes to this difference. In North America, most elementary school teachers are female and girls are superior in reading, while in England, Nigeria and West Germany, most elementary school teachers are male and boys are superior in reading (Finn, Dulberg and Reis, 1979). Expectation is also a factor teachers and parents expect girls to do better in school in the elementary grades, especially in reading and language arts, and this results in higher performance in these areas (Parsons, Adler and Kaczala, 1982).

Dwyer (1973) suggested four factors to explain sex differences in relation to reading achievement. These were:

1. The differential rate or level of maturation.
2. Content of basal readers.
3. The negative treatment of boys by female teachers
4. The differential cultural expectations for the male role

Gender differences in reading comprehension and achievement have been reported in the research literature. Gates (1961) conducted a study on gender differences in reading ability with 13 104 American elementary students in grades 2 through 8. The students, 6 646 boys and 6 458 girls, took the Gates Reading Survey Tests of speed of

reading, reading vocabulary, and level of comprehension. Even at the grade 2 level the girls obtained higher scores on all three tests. In the averaging of the test scores, grade 2 was excluded since the tests were said to be of such difficulty that they were not recommended for that grade level. The average for grades 3 through 8 showed a superiority of slightly less than 0.2 standard deviations for the girls. Gates concluded that the study strongly confirmed that on average, females significantly outscore males on reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Cultural variables have been credited with responsibility for reading achievement differences between boys and girls. Preston (1962) attributed achievement differences between American girls and boys to cultural variables. He stated sex differences typically found elsewhere tended to be reversed in German children because reading is "a normal activity of the male" (p. 353). Preston suggested that cultural and environmental factors rather than biological principles accounted for sex differences in reading achievement. Preston reported on research suggesting that American boys perceived reading as feminine, while German boys perceive it as a normal male activity. Kagen (1964) found that sex role standards could be a factor in school achievement when he discovered that the majority of grade 2 and 3 students in his study considered many school subjects, including reading, to be feminine. Johnson (1972) had similar results in his study of reading achievement in four countries. In England and Nigeria, boys outscored girls significantly, while in the United States and Canada, girls outscored boys.

Yarborough and Johnson (1980) reviewed international comparisons of gender differences in reading ability and found strong agreement among most investigators for cultural factors and teacher bias accounting for early reading achievement differences. They found that boys lagged behind girls until age 10 when sex differences become non-significant. Wallberg and Tsai (1985) used data from the 1979-80 National Assessment of Education Program (NAEP) in the United States. In this comprehensive study, gender was a control variable. Gender was significantly correlated with achievement and attitude. It was found that girls both scored higher and expressed more interest in reading than boys.

Three 1992 studies substantiated the finding that boys do not perform as well in reading than girls. Ostling (1992) reviewed a recent report compiled by the Wellesley College for Research on Women. The report synthesized hundred of studies of girls' achievement from preschool through secondary school graduation. The Wellesley authors concluded girls do better than boys starting in elementary school and continuing through high school. The Australian Northern Territory Department of Education released the results of the 1992 Primary Assessment program for students in years 5 and 7. Although boys marginally outperformed girls in the measurement strand of mathematics, girls outperformed boys on all reading tests. Cloer and Pearman (1992) described results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States. In this longitudinal study, students were assessed for reading at ages 9, 13 and 17. These results showed females outperformed males in each of six reading assignments. The gap between boys and girls was the same in 1990 as it was in 1971.

Legge (1994), Brown (1992), Byrne (1993) and Whiteway (1995), in studies of grade two and five Newfoundland students found no significant relationship between gender and reading comprehension. These findings differ from the those reported in the provincial testing standards for Newfoundland, which consistently report that females score higher than males in reading comprehension at the elementary grade levels.

Whiteway (1995) demonstrated the difference existing between male and female reading achievement in Newfoundland and Labrador through the provincially-administered Canadian Test of Basic Skills results for 1993. The difference in reading achievement between males and females in Newfoundland was demonstrated by a large sample testing through the Canadian Test of Basic Skills in the autumn of 1993. In the province-wide test that was administered to grade four students, females exceeded males on the reading subtest. Males achieved a grade equivalent score in the 39th percentile while females were in the 46th percentile. Additionally, almost twice as many male students received special education programs in language arts and mathematics for the 1993-94 year. Categorized by gender, 7 623 boys were special education students compared to 3 678 female students. It appears from these statistics that girls are experiencing more success in reading than boys. The provincial findings indicate that females have higher scores on reading comprehension tests than do males. This trend has been demonstrated in many grades throughout the decade (1989, 1991, 1993).

Modeling has been thought to play a role in gender differences in reading because all societies encourage children to model the same sex. Most elementary teachers in North

America are females, while in England, Nigeria and Germany most elementary teachers are male. This has been suggested as a reason for male or female reading superiority (Finn, Dulberg and Reis, 1979).

### Reading Comprehension and Attitude

There has been some research on the relationships between ability and attitude toward reading. Waller, Trismen and Wilder (1977) found in a study of grade 2, 4 and 6 children that those reading below grade level and receiving remedial help showed greater gains in attitude than those reading at or above grade level. Lohman (1983), in an investigation of the attitudes of 40 normal and 40 disabled readers, found significant differences in attitudes, with the lower group reflecting more negative scores than the higher group.

Bobel (1981) found consistently positive attitudes to reading in a study of a group of gifted students. Link (1984) studied thirty gifted students in grades 4 through 9 and found these children to have very positive attitudes toward reading. Anderson, Tollefson and Gilbert (1985) administered a reading questionnaire consisting of 11 attitudinal items to two-hundred and seventy-six gifted students in grades 1 through 12. The authors found significant sex and grade level difference with females reporting more positive attitudes than males, and an overall decline in positive attitudes with advancing grade.

In summary, the above discussion illustrates that a number of factors are involved in reading comprehension. Firstly, children who are strategic readers, readers who interact

with text and have awareness of a some control over their cognitive reading skills, demonstrate higher reading comprehension levels. A number of other factors affect reading comprehension levels as well. Reader self-concept and attitude toward reading appear to have some impact on reading comprehension, although the weight of the relationship is not demonstrated conclusively in the research. As well, gender may have an effect on primary and elementary grade level students' reading comprehension, with girls being slightly favoured. Cultural expectations and teacher expectations may affect findings related to the gender variable.

#### Summary

The literature indicates relationships among the variables to be investigated in this study: reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, gender and grade in elementary level high ability language arts students. Children who enjoy reading and feel good about themselves as readers tend to read more often and more widely, and those who do not enjoy reading and perceive themselves not to be strong readers do not read as often or as widely. As could be expected, most of the research indicates that students in the first group generally have higher reading and academic achievement levels and those in the second group have lower reading and achievement levels. Causal relationships, however, are not definitively stated, with the weight of the evidence showing the existence, and not the cause, of the relationships. Constructs in the affective domain tend to be difficult to measure and a

number of factors interfere with the objective of demonstrating cause

## Chapter III

### Design and Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, parental and peer expectations, gender and grade in a group of high ability elementary level students. This chapter presents the hypotheses, describes the sample, outlines the procedures and discusses the instruments used for measurement purposes.

#### Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this study are outgrowths of the questions posed in Chapter I. They flow from and are supported by the related research presented in Chapter II. Students were already grouped in enrichment classes, having scored in the eightieth percentile and above on the reading comprehension subtests of The Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (1995) was used to specifically assess how the students feel about themselves as readers, including their perceptions of the expectations their parents and peers hold of them as readers. The



Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) was administered to provide three attitude measurements: recreational, academic and total.

The following hypotheses were developed to reflect the various divisions of self-concept and reading attitude. They are stated as null hypotheses.

- Hypothesis 1: The relationship between high ability students' reading comprehension and reader self-concept (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 2: The relationship between high ability students' reading comprehension and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 3: The relationship between high ability students' attitude (total, recreational and academic) and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 4: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension will be zero.
- Hypothesis 5: The relationship between students' perceptions of parental expectations and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.

- Hypothesis 6: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 7: The relationship between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 8: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 9: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero.
- Hypothesis 10: High ability male and female students will not differ in reading comprehension.
- Hypothesis 11: High ability male and female students will not differ in reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states).
- Hypothesis 12: High ability male and female students will not differ in reading attitudes (total, recreational and academic).

- Hypothesis 13: High ability male and female students will not differ in perceptions of parental expectations.
- Hypothesis 14: High ability male and female students will not differ in perceptions of peer expectations.
- Hypothesis 15: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on reading comprehension.
- Hypothesis 16: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' reader self-perceptions (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) .
- Hypothesis 17: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' reading attitude (total, recreational and academic).
- Hypothesis 18: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' perceptions of parental expectations
- Hypothesis 19: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' perceptions of peer expectations.

### Sample

The study was conducted with a total of 74 grade four, five and six students in the language arts enrichment programs in urban and rural schools. To create a sample group

of 74 students, it was necessary to involve six groups of students from five schools. Thirty-six boys and 38 girls took part in the study.

### Procedures

Before beginning the research, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Memorial University of Newfoundland, (Appendix A), and from school board personnel and school principals (Appendices B and C). A letter was sent to the parents explaining the purpose of the testing and asking permission for their children to take part (Appendix D). The itinerant enrichment teachers administered the surveys to their classes. These teachers were familiar to the students so this was done to minimize any apprehension students might have with a testing situation. The two surveys were administered in one session. Both tests were easily administered. The teachers reported that approximately fifteen to twenty minutes were necessary to administer both surveys. Procedures for introducing and administering the surveys were discussed with each teacher and were followed with written instructions to ensure that the situation was the same in all six classes. Scores obtained by the children on the three tests were compared and analyzed to see if the relationships among reading comprehension, reader self-concept, reading attitude, grade and gender were statistically significant.

Two inventories were administered to these students to measure reading attitudes and perceptions of self as reader. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (1990) was used to determine students' attitudes toward reading. The Reader Self-Perception Scale

(1995) was used to measure how students see themselves as readers. The Canadian Test of Basic Skills is administered to every child in this school district during the grade three year.

For purposes of this study, students scored at the eightieth percentile or above on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) verbal subtest. This test had been administered for enrichment programming screening so there was no need to test these students for reading comprehension.

#### Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

This survey (McKenna and Kear, 1990) is administered to a group to determine attitudes toward reading of children in grades one through six. It consists of twenty items which can be administered in ten to fifteen minutes. Each item presents a brief statement about reading in simple language, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each of the pictures shows Garfield in a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative. McKenna and Kerr suggest the teacher emphasize that there are no right answers to encourage sincerity in responding. Also, it is recommended that a discussion of each of Garfield's poses - very happy, a little happy, a little upset, very upset - occur before the survey was administered so the children have a good understanding before proceeding with the survey. The four point scale of this survey avoided a neutral, central category which respondents often select in order to avoid committing themselves

As suggested, each statement was read twice. Children were asked to respond according to their own feelings.

The following scoring scheme was used: the happiest Garfield counted for four points, the slightly happy pose for three, the mildly upset for two and the very upset for one. Three scores were obtained for each student. The first ten items were totaled to provide a score of children's attitudes toward recreational reading, the second ten items related to children's attitudes toward academic reading, and a total of all twenty items provided a composite score. All three scores were used in this study.

Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, a statistic developed primarily to measure the internal consistency of attitude scales (Cronbach, 1951). The calculations for both the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and for the subjects of this study are given in Table 1

Table 1

Reliability Analysis ofElementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)

Reading Attitude Category	Alpha	Standardized Alpha
Academic Reading Attitude	.8774	.83
Recreational Reading Attitude	.8666	.82
Total Reading Attitude	.9185	.89

The reliability of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey was calculated for both the subscales and for the composite scores. These coefficients ranged from .74 to .89. The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability test calculated total reliability at .82 for recreational subscale, .83 for academic subscale, and .89 for the total, or full scale, score.

It was noted by the authors that all coefficients were .80 or higher except for the recreational subscale at grades 1 and 2. McKenna and Kear (1990) hypothesize that the stability of young children's attitudes toward leisure reading grows with their decoding ability and familiarity with reading as a pastime.

The reliability of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey for use with the population in this study was calculated for the both subscales and for the composite

scores. The Cronbach's alpha reliability test calculated total reliability at .87 for the recreational subscale, .88 for the academic subscale, and .92 for the total, or full scale, score.

### Reader Self-Perception Scale

The Reader Self-Perception Scale is a scale that measures the psychological construct of reader self-efficacy. Bandura (1977, 1982) defined self-efficacy as "a person's judgments of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this perception has on the on-going and future conduct of the activity" (Henk and Melnick, 1995, p. 471). This scale measures four basic factors contributing to reader self-efficacy: performance, observational comparison, social feedback and physiological states. For the purposes of this scale, Henk and Melnick (1995) redefined the performance category to focus specifically on progress. This category of the scale is defined as how one's perception of present reading performance compares with performance in the past. Observational comparison measures how a child's perception of his or her reading ability compares with that of classmates. Social feedback includes direct or indirect input about reading from family members, teachers and classmates. Physiological states refers to the internal feelings experienced by the child during reading.

The Reader Self-Perception Scale is made up of thirty-three positively stated statements: one general item and thirty-two items representing the four scales. The general item was used to prompt the students to think about reading. The other thirty-two



items deal with overall reading ability, word recognition, word analysis, fluency and comprehension. The language of the scale is fairly simple so that children's reading ability would not be a factor affecting student responses. There are brief written directions on the instrument, an explanation of the codes, and a sample question. The rating system for the questions is a five-point Likert system by which the children rate how much they agree or disagree with each statement. 1 indicates they strongly disagree, 2 indicates they disagree, 3 indicates undecided, 4 indicates they agree and 5 indicates strongly agree. The number of items varies according to the scale so the maximum scores for each will differ.

The Reader Self-Perception Scale takes approximately 10-15 minutes to administer. The teacher explains the purpose of the assessment to the class and works through the example question with the students. The exact directions to be read by the teacher are included in the support material for the scale. Children are encouraged to ask questions if they are not clear on a question.

The scale is scored by summing the raw scores for each of the four scales. Norming data is available for comparison of scores (Henk and Melnick, 1995). The Cronbach's Alpha scores for both the Reader Self-Perception Scale and the subjects assessed in this study are contained in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliability Analysis of  
Reader Self-Perception Scale

Reader Self-Perception Category	Alpha	Standardized Alpha
Observational Comparison	.7550	.82
Social Feedback	.8004	.81
Progress	.8213	.84
Physiological States	.8502	.84
Overall Reader self-concept	.9204	--

-- denotes unavailable score

In the Reader Self-Perception Scale, the following Alpha reliabilities were calculated. progress, .84; observational comparison, .82; social feedback, .81; and physiological states, .84. The scale does not give a total, or overall score of reader self-concept. Reliability scores for the group of students participating in this study were calculated at progress, .82; observational comparison, .76; social feedback, .80; and

physiological states, .85. As well, an overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability measure was performed on the total of the 32 items, resulting in a calculation of .92.

Alpha reliability coefficients were also calculated for the questions that were used in this study to specifically examine children's perceptions of parental expectations and peer expectations. These results are given in Table 3. The information was collected through questions in the social feedback sub-category on the Reader Self-Perception Scale.

Questions 12, 31, and 33, all from the social feedback subtest, were used to examine children's perceptions of parental expectations. In each case the subject was changed from "family" to "my parent(s)". The three questions respectively were 'My parent(s) think I am a good reader', 'My parent(s) think I read pretty well', and 'My parent(s) like to listen to me read'. However, when reliability tests were performed upon these three items, a very low alpha reliability score was produced (.5132). This was not acceptable for the inclusion of students' perceptions of parental expectations. Reliability was then tested with questions 12 and 31 resulting in an acceptable alpha score of .7219. Therefore, the responses to questions 12 and 31 were used to determine perceptions of parental expectations.

The information about children's perceptions of peer expectations was collected through three questions in the social feedback sub-category on the Reader Self-Perception Scale. The three questions were 'My classmates like to listen to me read', 'My classmates think that I read pretty well', and 'Other kids think I'm a good reader'. Alpha coefficients

for these three items were .7341, acceptable for this measure.

Table 3

Reliability Analysis of Child's Perceptions  
of Parental and Peer Expectations

Perception of Expectation	Alpha
Parental	.7219
Peer	.7341

The Canadian Test of Basic Skills

This standardized test was administered by the classroom teacher to the entire class. It can be used at any grade level from three to twelve. The reading comprehension subtest assesses abilities in reading comprehension. It measures developed abilities, not innate abilities. For the purposes of this study, the results of the district's enrichment program testing were used to determine the group. Students who had scores in the eightieth percentile or above in the reading comprehension sub-test of the assessment while in grade three were considered to be high ability students in reading comprehension.

Reliabilities for the Canadian Test of Basic Skills subtests vary from .83 to .96. The specific reliabilities by subtest and grade are not provided by the teacher's guide (King-Shaw, 1989).

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provided three reading attitude scores (recreational, academic and full-scale reading attitude). The Reader Self Perception Scale provided five scores (progress, observational comparison, physiological states, social feedback and overall score). Questions were slightly altered from "my family" to "my parent(s)" to provide information about children's concepts of parental expectations. General correlational statistical tests were applied to examine the intercorrelations among the five reader self-concept scores, the three reading attitude scores and the two expectation scores. Analyses of variance were used to determine the influence of gender on reading comprehension, reader self-concept, including progress, observational comparison, social feedback, physiological states, and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations of their reading ability, and reading attitude, including academic, recreational and overall reading attitude. Spearman coefficient correlations were used to determine the influence of grade level on reading comprehension, reader self-concept, including progress, observational comparison, social feedback, physiological states, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations of their reading ability, and reading attitude, including academic, recreational and overall reading attitude.

## Chapter IV

### Analysis of Data

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis of the data collected in the study to determine if the questions asked in Chapter I and the hypotheses posed in Chapter III have been supported. Descriptive statistics which generated means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores for the two surveys and one test, as well as individual test items, were used. As well, three statistical procedures have been applied to the raw scores collected. Regular correlational analyses, using the Pearson-Product-Moment Method, were performed to examine the relationships among measures of reader self-perception, reading attitude and reading comprehension. Analyses of variance were used to determine the influence of gender on reader self-perception, reading attitude, reading comprehension and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations. For the analyses of variance, gender was considered the independent variable, and reader self perception, reading attitude and reading comprehension, the dependent variables. Spearman coefficient correlational tests were used with grade level considered the

independent variable and reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitude and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations the dependent variables. Each hypothesis is restated and the data pertaining to that hypothesis is reported. Tables are used to report the findings as well. Those data are then examined and their significance interpreted.

### The Analysis of Variables

#### Reading Comprehension and Reader Self-perception

Measures obtained for the students' reading comprehension were correlated with relevant variables using the Pearson Product - Moment Method, to see if any significant relationships existed. The results obtained relate to tests of the first proposed hypothesis. The hypothesis is restated and the significance of data relevant to it is discussed. The data collected for hypothesis 1 is reported in Table 4

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between high ability students' reading comprehension and students' reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.

No significant relationships were found between reading comprehension and overall reader self-perception, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states. This leads to the acceptance of the first hypotheses as stated.

Table 4Relationship betweenReading Comprehension and Reader Self-perception


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Relationship between Reader Self-perception Categories	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Overall	.1451
Social feedback	.0955
Observational comparison	-.1771
Progress	.0797
Physiological states	.1347

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\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

Reading Comprehension and Reading Attitude

The raw scores obtained on the Reading Attitude Survey, including recreational reading, academic reading and total reading attitude scores, were correlated with reading comprehension scores to determine if a relationship could be found between reading comprehension and attitude to reading. The results obtained pertaining to hypothesis 2 are presented and discussed below. The data appears in Table 5.



Hypothesis 2: The relationship between high ability students' reading comprehension and reading attitude (total, recreational, academic) will be zero.

No significant relationships were found between reading comprehension and recreational reading attitude, academic reading attitude, and total reading attitude. This leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 2 as stated.

Table 5

Relationship between  
Reading Comprehension and Reading Attitude

Reading Attitude Categories	Pearson's r
Recreational reading attitude	.1079
Academic reading attitude	-.0672
Overall reading attitude	-.0116

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

For hypotheses 1 and 2, dealing with students' reading comprehension, perception of selves as readers, and reading attitude, no significant relationships were found. This

leads to the acceptance of the first two hypotheses. No relationships were found between reading comprehension, reader self perception, and reading attitude.

### Reading Attitude and Reader Self-perception

Measures obtained for the students' reading comprehension were correlated using the Pearson Product - Moment Method, to see if any significant relationships existed. The results obtained relate to the tests of hypothesis 3. The data are reported in Table 6. The hypothesis is restated and the significance of the data relevant to it is discussed.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between high ability students' attitude (total, recreational and academic) and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.

Significant positive relationships were found between students' reader self-perceptions and their attitudes to reading. This is cause for rejection of hypothesis 3. There is a significant, positive relationship between these students' overall reader self-perceptions and their attitudes to reading. There are also significant relationships between the subcategories of social feedback, observational comparison, progress and physiological states and reading attitude.

Table 6

Relationship between Reading Attitude  
and Reader Self-perception

Reader Self-perception Category	Pearson's r
Overall reader self-perception	.6383***
Social feedback	.4966***
Observational comparison	.3972***
Progress	.4188***
Physiological states	.7214***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

Children's Perceptions of Parental Expectations

Measures obtained for students' perceptions of parental expectations were correlated with reading comprehension, the five categories of reader self-perception, and the three categories of reading attitude. This information was collected through three questions in the Social Feedback sub-category on the Reader Self-Perception Scale. In each case, the subject was changed from 'family' to 'my parent(s)'. The three questions were: 'My parent(s) think I am a good reader', 'My parents think I read pretty well', and 'My parents like to listen to me read'. However, when reliability tests were performed

upon these three items, a very low alpha reliability score was produced (.5132). This was unacceptable for the inclusion of students' perceptions of parental expectations. Reliability was then tested with questions 12 and 31, resulting in an acceptable alpha score of .7219. Therefore, the responses to questions 12 and 31 were used to determine perceptions of parental expectations.

The data obtained for hypotheses 4, 5 and 6 are contained in Table 7.

**Hypothesis 4** The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension will be zero.

A correlational coefficient of .1409 was computed between these students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension. The relationship was not significant and no relationship exists between students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

**Hypothesis 5** The relationship between students' perceptions of parental expectations and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.

Significant positive relationships were found between students' reader self-perception and their perceptions of parental expectations. This is cause for rejection of hypothesis 5. There is a significant, positive relationship between these students' reader self-perceptions and their perceptions of parental expectations.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero

Significant positive relationships were found between students' reading attitude (total, academic and recreational) and their perceptions of parental expectations. This is cause for rejection of hypothesis 6. There is a significant, positive relationship between these students' reading attitude and their perceptions of parental expectations.

Table 7

Factors Related to  
Children's Perceptions of Parental Expectations

Factors	Pearson's r
Reading comprehension	-.1409
Overall reader self-perception	.5897***
Social feedback	.5702***
Observational comparison	.3374**
Progress	.5000***
Physiological states	.4951***
Total reading attitude	.3472**
Recreational reading attitude	.3735***
Academic reading attitude	.2776*

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

For hypotheses 4, 5 and 6, dealing with the relationship between high ability students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension, reader self-perception, and reading attitude, significant relationships were found in two areas.

Relationships were found to exist between students' perceptions of parental expectations, the five categories of reader self- perception, and the three categories of reading attitude. These hypotheses were therefore rejected. No relationship was found to exist between high achieving students' perceptions of parental expectations and reading comprehension. This hypothesis was accepted.

#### Children's Perceptions of Peer Expectations

Measures obtained for the students' perceptions of peer expectations were correlated with reading comprehension, the five categories of reading attitude and the three categories of reader self-perception. The information was collected through three questions in the Social Feedback sub-category on the Reader Self-Perception Scale. The three questions were: 'My classmates like to listen to me read', 'My classmates think that I read pretty well', and 'Other kids think I'm a good reader'. The data obtained for hypotheses 7 through 9 are contained in Table 8.

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of peer expectations and students' reading comprehension will be zero.

A negative correlational coefficient of  $-0.338$  was computed between these students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading comprehension. The relationship was insignificant and no relationship exists between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading comprehension. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 8: The relationship between high ability student's perceptions of peer expectations and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states) will be zero.

There were significant, positive correlations between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress and physiological states). There is a relationship between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reader self-perception and therefore the hypothesis is rejected

Hypothesis 9: The relationship between high ability students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic) will be zero

There were significant, positive correlations between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude (total, recreational and academic). There is a relationship between students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude and therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

For hypotheses 7 through 9, dealing with the relationship between high ability students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading comprehension, reader self-



perceptions, and reading attitude, significant relationships were found in two of the three areas. Relationships were found to exist between students' perceptions of peer expectations and the five categories of reader self-perception, as well as students' perceptions of peer expectations and the three categories of reading attitude. These hypotheses were therefore rejected. No relationship was found to exist between high achieving students' perceptions of peer expectations and reading comprehension. This hypothesis was accepted.

Table 8

Factors InfluencingChildren's Perception of Peer Expectations

Factors	Pearson's r
Reading comprehension	-.0338
Overall reader self-concept	.6763***
Observational comparison	.5318***
Progress	.2825**
Physiological states	.5273***
Total reading attitude	.4088***
Recreational reading attitude	.3780***
Academic reading attitude	.3763***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

An overall correlational matrix depicting the correlational coefficients and levels of significance between reading comprehension, reader self-perception and the four subcategories of this construct, the three reading attitudes, and students' perceptions of parental and peer expectations, is reported in Table 9. The table provides an overview of

all the significant and non-significant relationships computed using the Pearson Product-Moment Method of Correlation.

Table 9

Overall Matrix of Variables

	RC	ORSP	TRA	PAREX	PEEREX
RC	--	.0451	-.0116	-.1409	-.0338
ORSP	.0451	--	.6383***	.5897***	.6763***
TRA	-.0116	.6383***	--	.3472**	.4088***
ParEx	-.1409	.5897***	.3472**	--	--
PeerEx	-.0338	.6763***	.4088***	--	--

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

Note. RC Reading Comprehension  
 ORSP Overall Reader Self-perception  
 TRA Total Reading Attitude  
 PAREX Children's Perceptions of Parental Expectations  
 PEEREX Children's Perceptions of Peer Expectations

### Gender

To determine whether gender has an influence on these students' reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitudes, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations, an analysis of variance was performed. Gender was considered the independent variable and reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitudes, and perceptions of parent and peer expectations were treated as dependent variables. The hypotheses pertaining to gender are restated and the data obtained are discussed.

Hypothesis 10. High ability male and female students will not differ in reading comprehension

To test for significance between males' and females' reading comprehension scores, an analysis of variance was performed. The mean for the males was 88.96 while the mean for the females was 90.16. While the mean for the females was higher, this mean difference was not significant with a probability of .366, and therefore hypothesis 10 is accepted. The gender of this group of high ability students has no significant influence on reading comprehension.

Table 10

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Reading Comprehension

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	88.6944	7.0744	1.1719	1,72	.8285	.3657
Females	38	90.1579	6.7565	1.0960			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error, df = degrees of freedom, F = F ratio, p = probability

Hypothesis 11: High ability male and female students will not differ in reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states).

To test for significance between males' and females' reader self-perception scores, an analysis of variance was performed. The data for all five variables overall reader self-perception, social feedback, observational comparison, progress and physiological states are contained in tables 11 through 15 on the following pages. While the mean scores for females were slightly higher than for males, the difference was insignificant. The gender of this group of high ability students has no significant influence on reader self-perception scores. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

Table 11

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Overall Reader Self-perception

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	136.0278	16.0561	2.6760	1,72	1.7686	.1877
Females	38	140.5526	13.1369	2.1311			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 12

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Social Feedback

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	36.5833	4.9821	.8304	1,72	.8415	.3620
Females	38	37.6053	4.6005	.7463			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 13

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Observational Comparison

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	24.6111	3.4333	.5722	1,72	.1679	.6832
Females	38	24.9474	3.6164	.5867			

S.D. = standard deviation, S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 14

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Progress

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	41.7500	4.3842	.7307	1,72	.0393	.8435
Females	38	41.9474	4.1846	.6788			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 15

Analysis of Variance between  
Gender and Physiological States

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	33.0833	6.0963	1.0160	1,72	6.1744	.0153
Females	38	36.0526	4.0266	.6532			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Hypothesis 12: High ability male and female students will not differ in their reading attitudes (total, recreational and academic).

To test for significance between males' and females' reading attitude scores, an analysis of variance was performed. The mean scores for the females was higher, but this mean difference was insignificant. Therefore hypothesis 12 is accepted. The gender of this group of high ability students has no significant influence on reading attitude. The data for all three attitude variables: total, recreational and academic reading attitude, are shown in Tables 16 through 18 on the following pages



Table 16

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Total Reading Attitude

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	60.5278	11.1905	1.8651	1,72	1.3032	.2574
Females	38	63.3421	10.0089	1.6237			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 17

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Recreational Reading Attitude

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	32.1667	5.6188	.9365	1,72	2.5606	.1139
Females	38	34.0526	4.4839	.7274			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Table 18

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Academic Reading Attitude

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	28.3611	6.2526	1.0421	1,72	.3862	5362
Females	38	29.2895	6.5797	1.0674			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Hypothesis 13: High ability male and female students will not differ in perceptions of parental expectations.

To test for significance between males' and females' perceptions of parental expectations, an analysis of variance was performed. The mean for the males was 9.3899 while the mean for the females was 9.4474. While the mean for the females was higher, this mean difference was not significant with a probability of .817, and therefore hypothesis 13 is accepted. The gender of this group of high ability students has no relationship to their perceptions of parental expectations.

Table 19

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Perceptions of Parental Expectations

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	9.3889	1.2254	.2042	1,72	.0542	.8165
Females	38	9.4474	.9211	.1494			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Hypothesis 14: High ability male and female students will not differ in their perceptions of peer expectations.

To test for significance between males' and females' perceptions of peer expectations, an analysis of variance was performed. The mean for the males was 10.8056 while the mean for the females was 11.2895. While the mean for the females was higher, this mean difference was not significant with a probability of .364, and therefore, hypothesis 14 is accepted. The gender of this group of high ability students has no relationship to their perceptions of peer expectations.

Table 20

Analysis of Variance betweenGender and Children's Perceptions of Peer Expectations

Group	Number of	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	df	F	p
	Students	Value Bias					
Males	36	10.8056	2.5391	.4232	1,72	.8346	.3640
Females	38	11.2895	1.9988	.3242			

S.D. = standard deviation; S.E. = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; F = F ratio; p = probability

Gender was not a significant factor in any of the areas explored by these hypotheses: reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitude, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations. In each case the mean score was slightly higher for females; however, there was not enough difference to consider this significant

Grade

To determine whether grade has an influence on these students' reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitudes, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations, Spearman Correlational tests were performed. Grade was considered the independent variable and reading comprehension, reader self-perceptions, reading attitudes, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations were treated as dependent

variables. Hypotheses pertaining to grade are restated and the data obtained are discussed. This data pertaining to the grade level and all variables: reader self-concept, reading attitude, and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, are contained in the following table, Table 21.

Hypothesis 15: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on reading comprehension.

A negative correlational coefficient  $-0.2010$  was computed between grade level and reading comprehension. Thus, no relationship exists between students' grade levels and reading comprehension.

Hypothesis 16: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' reader self-perception (overall, social feedback, observational comparison, progress, and physiological states).

Negative correlations were computed between grade level and reader self-perception. Since these are insignificant, no relationship exists between grade level and reader self-perceptions. This hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 17: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' reading attitude (total, recreational and academic).

Insignificant correlational coefficients were computed between grade level and students' reading attitudes. Thus, no relationship exists between students' grade levels and students' reading attitudes. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 18: High ability students' grade level will not have a significant influence on students' perceptions of parental expectations.

A correlational coefficient of  $-.0902$  was computed between these students' perceptions of parental expectations and their grade levels. The relationship was not significant. Consequently, hypothesis 18 is accepted. Grade level is unrelated to perceptions of parental expectations.

Hypothesis 19: High ability students' grade level will not have significant influence on students' perceptions of peer expectations.

A correlational coefficient of  $-.1152$  was computed between grade level and students' perceptions of peer expectations. The relationship was insignificant and therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Grade was not a significant variable and did not have an effect on reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitude, or perceptions of parental and peer expectations.

Table 21

Grade and CategorySpearman Correlational Coefficient

Category	Grade Level
Reading comprehension	.2010
Overall reader self-perception	-.0806
Social feedback	-.1622
Observational comparison	-.0738
Progress	-.0264
Physiological states	-.0060
Total reading attitude	-.1535
Recreational reading attitude	-.0674
Academic reading attitude	-.1925
Perceptions of parental expectations	-.0902
Perceptions of peer expectations	-.1152

Note: No significant differences were found for any variable.

### Summary of Findings

Regular correlational analyses, analyses of variance, and Spearman Correlational analyses were performed in order to analyze the data collected in this study. The results obtained indicated whether the stated hypotheses should be accepted or rejected. A number of statistically significant relationships were found. These are listed below. Following the list of statistically significant relationships, those relationships which could not be supported statistically will be given.

For this group of high ability students, statistically significant relationships were found between:

1. reading attitude and reader self-perception (hypothesis 3).
2. parental expectations and reader self-perception (hypothesis 5)
3. parental expectations and reading attitude (hypothesis 6).
4. peer expectations and reader self-perception (hypothesis 8).
5. peer expectations and reading attitude (hypothesis 9)

For this group of high achieving students, the following relationships were not statistically significant:

1. reading comprehension and reader self-perception (hypothesis 1)
2. reading comprehension and reading attitude (hypothesis 2)



3. parental expectations and reading comprehension (hypothesis 4).
4. peer expectations and reading comprehension (hypothesis 7).
5. gender and reading comprehension (hypothesis 10).
6. gender and reader self-perception (hypothesis 11).
7. gender and reading attitude (hypothesis 12).
8. gender and parental expectations (hypothesis 13).
9. gender and peer expectations (hypothesis 14).
10. grade and reading comprehension (hypothesis 15).
11. grade and reader self-perception (hypothesis 16).
12. grade and reading attitude (hypothesis 17).
13. grade and parental expectations (hypothesis 18).
14. grade and peer expectations (hypothesis 19).

A significant relationship was shown between reading attitude and reader self-concept. Significant relationships between children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations and the variables of reader self-perception and reading attitudes were also shown. Reading comprehension was not a significant variable in any of the hypotheses. Gender and grade were also not significant.

## Chapter V

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, Educational Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, the study will be summarized and conclusions arising from the findings will be discussed. Secondly, educational implications will be presented based on the results of the study. Thirdly, recommendations for further research will be proposed.

#### Summary and Conclusions

This study evolved from a review of the literature about the interrelationships among high ability students' reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitude, perceptions of parental and peer expectations for reading, gender and grade in high ability elementary grade language arts students.

The study investigated the relationships among the various aspects of reading comprehension, reader self-perception, reading attitude, gender, and grade in a group of 74 high ability grade four, five and six language arts students. The aspects of reader self-perception investigated included four variables from the self-efficacy model adapted from

Bandura (1977) by Henk and Melnick (1995). These included social feedback, observational comparison, progress and physiological states. An overall category of reader self-perception, comprised of these four aspects, was also included. Three aspects of reading attitude, including recreational, academic and overall reading attitude, were examined. As well, students' perceptions of parental and peer expectations were also addressed.

The specific questions addressed were:

1. Are there relationships among children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension scores in high ability elementary level language arts students?
2. Do male high ability students differ from female high ability students in their perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension?
3. Are there any differences in children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, attitudes toward reading, self-perceptions as readers and reading comprehension between high ability students enrolled in different grade levels?

The study was conducted with 74 grade four, five and six students in the language arts enrichment programs in urban and rural schools. To create a sample group of 74 students, it was necessary to involve six groups of students from five schools. Thirty-six boys and 38 girls participated in the study.

Students involved in the enrichment groups had scores above the eightieth percentile on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills reading comprehension subtest. Four itinerant enrichment teachers administered two surveys to their classes: The Reader Self-Perception Scale and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The two surveys took a combined total of approximately 20 minutes to administer. The Reader Self-Perception Scale yielded five scores: social feedback, observational comparison, progress, physiological states and overall reader self-perception. As well, the questions that measured perceptions of parental and peer expectations were drawn from the social feedback category of this survey. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey yielded three reading attitude scores including recreational, academic and a total score. Regular correlational analyses were performed to examine intercorrelations among the five reader self-perception scores, the three reading attitude scores, the reading comprehension score and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations scores. Analyses of variance were performed to determine the influence of gender on reader self-perception, reading attitude, and reading comprehension and perceptions of parental and peer expectations. Spearman correlational analyses were performed to examine the interrelationships between grade and the following variables: reading comprehension, reader-self-perception, reading attitude, and perceptions of parental and peer expectations. A number of significant relationships were found.

### Reading Comprehension

No significant relationships were found between reading comprehension and any of the other variables in this study.

No significant relationships existed between reading comprehension and reader self-perception. The relationship between reading comprehension and reader self-perception has not been clearly delineated by the research findings. Woodlands and Wong (1979) found that only a "fairly" accurate prediction of a student's academic grouping could be made on the basis of self-concept scores. A number of studies have indicated a positive relationship between reader self-perception and reading achievement (Briggs, 1987; Byrne, 1986; Marsh, Smith, Barnes and Butler, 1983; Peterson, 1981; Rogers, Smith and Coleman, 1978). As well, there are studies which support the position that there is no causal relationship between achievement and reader self-perception. The findings of this study were corroborated by Byrne (1986), Maruyama, Rubin and Kingsburg (1981) and McIntire and Drummond (1977), all of whom were all involved in studies that did not demonstrate a correlation between the reading comprehension and reader-self-perception.

One possible explanation for the findings of this study may lie with the subjects. All of the students in this study were high ability language arts students. The fact that a relationship was not found between reading comprehension and the dependent variables may be a reflection of the reading success experienced by this group of students and the limited range or variation in their reading achievement scores. An alternate explanation

has been posited by Pottebaum, Keith and Ehly, (1986) who suggested that self-concept and reading achievement may be cyclical in nature; that is, one may cause the other, but the magnitude of the effect may be too small to be detected.

Both reading success and lack of success have been linked to children's self-concept. Thomas (1984), in a study of one hundred sixth grade students, found that a significant relationship existed between how good readers viewed their ability to read and their actual reading ability. Those who believed themselves to be good readers had higher reading ability scores. If children develop strong positive self-concepts as readers, they will attempt more difficult material, enjoy reading, and be apt to read more widely. Wide reading makes better readers (Quandt, 1986, p. 5).

This study did not find relationships between reading comprehension and any facets of reading attitude overall, academic or recreational. The little variation in the reading comprehension scores of these students may have contributed to this finding. Most of these students cite reading as an enjoyable activity. The majority of students who are involved in language arts enrichment programs at the elementary level report a strong enjoyment for reading. It is frequently named as a hobby in self-introduction exercises and questionnaires. As well, these students tend to respect each other's reading interests in discussions and often take suggestions for new books from each other.

Bobel (1961) and Link (1984) found consistently positive attitudes to reading in studies of groups of gifted students. These studies indicate the connection, or relationship, between reading attitude and reading comprehension, but the causal factor is

Perhaps both the cultural and environmental factors that affect students perceived to be above average or exceptional, along with modeling viewed at home or with enrichment teachers, has some effect on the relationship between reading comprehension and gender in this study. Many of these students come from homes where reading is valued and considered to be worthwhile by both parents; therefore both male and female reading role models exist in these homes. Teachers often expect these students to read well. Students who perform well are expected to continue with high levels of performance, whether they are male or female.

#### Reader Self-perception

In this study statistically significant relationships were found between all five aspects of reader-self perception and the three facets of reading attitude. There were no significant relationships between gender or grade and reader self-perception or reading attitude.

The findings of this study regarding the relationships between reader self-perception and reading attitude are supported in much of the research. Brown and Briggs (1989) posited that a correlation exists between positive attitude and expectation to achieve success with reading. Briggs (1987), Claytor (1979) and Zimmerman and Allebrand (1965) all demonstrated a positive relationship between reader self-perception and reading achievement. This has also been demonstrated in the Newfoundland studies of Brown (1992) and Whiteway (1995) and with primary and elementary grade students

None of these studies draw conclusions about causality.

There were no significant differences in reader self-perception when measured with both grade and gender in this study. Much of the literature indicates that children in earlier grades hold more positive attitudes toward reading than children in higher grades, and that a decrease in attitude toward reading exists in each successively higher grade (Bullen, 1972; Crews, 1978; Johnson, 1964; Swanson, 1972). Ashley (1970) found that the 10 to 11 year old range was the peak time for reading attitude and volume of reading. Many of the students in this study group fall within the 10 to 11 year old range. This may account for the lack of difference among the grades. As well, it has been posited that negative attitudes are established when learning to read becomes a task (Arlin, 1976; Johnson, 1964; Parker, 1978; Swanson, 1982). For the majority of these high ability students, it can be assumed that they are strong strategic readers and that reading does not become a task for them.

No significant differences were found between the reading attitudes held by boys and girls in this study. Although much of the literature reports that girls have more positive attitudes than boys toward reading (Arlin, 1976; Johnson, 1964; Kennedy and Halinski, 1978; Wallbrown, Levine and Engin, 1981), it is not always a position that is supported (Alexander and Filler, 1976). Parker and Paradis (1986) found that girls tended to hold more positive attitudes toward boys at the primary and elementary grades, but the difference was only four raw points in primary and six in elementary. Such a small spread hardly allows for generalization.



Role models can be an important factor in the development of reading attitude, and it may be that many of the high ability males in this study are exposed to males who read for work and pleasure. This, along with the small difference in age among these students and the ease with which most of these subjects learned to read, may explain the findings of this study.

### Reading Attitude

In this study significant, positive relationships were found between students' reading attitudes and reader self-perception, perceptions of parental expectations and perceptions of peer expectations. It would appear that students who believed themselves to be good readers, and believed that their parents and peers considered them to be good readers, were also students who held positive attitudes toward reading.

There were many similarities between items on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the physiological states subcategory of the Reader Self-Perception Scale. All of the items on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey begin with the phrase 'How do you feel about' while 5 of the 7 items in the physiological states subcategory of the Reader Self-Perception Scale address how the students feel. Students are asked to respond to the following statements on the Reader Self-Perception Scale: (8) 'I feel good inside when I read'; (16) 'Reading makes me feel happy inside'; (21) 'I feel calm when I read'; (25) 'I feel comfortable when I read'; and (29) 'Reading makes me feel good'. This subcategory measuring reader self-perception is very similar to the types of 'feeling' questions asked

about attitude on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. These similarities may account for some of the findings that closely link reader self-perception and reading attitude.

#### Perception of Parental Expectations

Significant relationships existed between children's perceptions of parental expectations and reader self-perception and reading attitude. No significant differences existed among perception of parental expectations, grade and gender. The results of this study are corroborated by many of the studies reviewed.

Parents are the most important significant others (Battle, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Felker, 1974; Hammachek, 1978; LaBenne and Greene, 1969; Purkey, 1970; Samuels, 1977; Silvernail, 1985). It is reasonable to assume that the appraisals of parents greatly influence children's views of themselves. It is not surprising that a strong link exists between students' perceptions of parental expectations, reader self-perception and reading attitude.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1969; Bandura, 1977; Bandura and Kupers, 1964, Bandura and Wagner, 1963) posits that self-concept development comes from modeling, that children imitate parental behaviours. According to this theory, children's self-concepts are closely and positively related to parental self-concepts. It may be that students in this study frequently have parents who are capable readers and who enjoy reading, and therefore their expectations of parental perceptions grow from this observance

Children's beliefs about parental expectations have been explored as significant factors affecting reading achievement. Gigliotti and Brookover (1975) and Gnolnick, Ryan and Deci (1991) hypothesized that children's beliefs about parental expectations would be a significant factor affecting reading achievement. The results of both studies indicated a high relationship between children's actual performances and their perceptions of parental expectations.

There was a strong correlation between students' reading attitudes including recreational, academic and overall attitude, and perceptions of parental expectations. Two Newfoundland studies found contradictory results regarding perceptions of parental expectations. Brown (1992), in a study of grade 2 students, found a relationship between all aspects of reading attitude and perceptions of parental expectations. This was not supported in a study by Whiteway (1995) of grade 5 students. She found that a relationship existed only between academic reading attitude and perceptions of parental expectations. The different findings may be in part attributed the difference in age groups. Perhaps the common variable of high ability with the students in this study is part of the explanation for the significance of relationships between perceptions of parental expectations, reader self-perceptions and reading attitudes.

The significant relationships found among children's perceptions of parental expectations, reader self-perception and reading attitude underscore the need for a positive supportive home environments with early emphasis on and modeling of reading for learning and for pleasure. Positive expectations by parents are an important link to

children's attitude and success in reading.

### Children's Perceptions of Peer Expectations

In this study significant relationships existed between children's perceptions of peer expectations and reader self-perception and reading attitude. No significant relationships existed among children's perception of peer expectations, grade and gender.

The social learning theory posits that self-concept comes from four main sources of information: performance, observational comparison, social feedback and physiological states. Perceptions of peer expectations are found in the two categories of social feedback and observational comparison.

Although parents provide the first influence on self-concept development, as children grow and leave the home environment and interact with their peers in both formal and informal settings, much of their feedback comes from their peers. Although performance accomplishments are considered to be the most powerful sources of personal information (Bandura, 1977; Gorrell, 1990; Purkey, 1970), observational comparison is also important. Henk and Melnick (1995) and Wagner (1983) conclude that comparison with others is a contributor to the growth of self-concept. Many high ability students compare themselves positively with other students in terms of grades, effort and amount of time needed to finish assignments.

Social feedback includes direct or indirect input about reading. Children who receive positive feedback tend to feel better about their performances than those who do

not. Younger children respond well to feedback about their efforts as well as their achievements (Andrews and Debus, 1978; Schunk, 1982a), but as they get older, feedback about ability and achievement becomes more important (Schunk, 1984; Schunk, 1983; Schunk and Gunn, 1985; Schunk and Rice, 1984).

At the elementary level students often have admiration for those who do well in class, finish work early, are called upon frequently by the teacher, and who leave the room for enrichment programs. This may influence student's perceptions of peer expectations in this study.

The results in this study contradict the findings of Brown (1992) and Whiteway (1995) with children's perceptions of peer expectations and attitude to reading. Both of these Newfoundland studies of heterogeneous classroom groups, grade 2 and 5 respectively, found that there were no significant relationships between perceptions of peer expectations and reading attitude.

The relationship between children's perceptions of peer expectations, reader self-perception, and reading attitude make it clear that a supportive, respectful classroom environment where students can take risks with reading without facing ridicule by their peers is an important aspect of building strong, confident readers.

### Summary of Findings

It appears that the results of this study support the phenomenon known in the reading literature as the "Matthew Effect" (Stanovich, 1980). This is an example of "the rich

getting richer", that is, students who feel good about themselves as readers and have positive attitudes toward reading will read more than students who do not feel good about themselves as readers and have negative attitudes toward reading. Consequently, those who read more will become better readers. Causality is not determined in this cycle. It is not known which variable causes which result. However, the existence of such a cycle gives parents and teachers the knowledge that a supportive, comfortable reading environment where children are encouraged and praised for reading efforts and achievements and where direct instruction in strategic reading skills occurs is the combination most likely to allow children to develop into strong, confident readers who enjoy reading. The finding of a relationship between reader self-perception and reading attitude indicates that it is important that students be encouraged to feel good about reading and their reading performances with experiences of success and reward.

#### Educational Implications

The results of this study have a number of implications for the education of high ability students.

The results of this study indicate that for students who have high reading comprehension scores, reading comprehension, grade and gender are not related to reader self-perception, reading attitude or perceptions of parental and peer expectations. However, relationships were found among reader self-perception, reading attitude, and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations

These findings put to rest some of the beliefs that are frequently heard about elementary school students. The beliefs that girls are stronger readers, have more positive reader self-perceptions and enjoy reading more are not supported for students in the high ability range. In this study there were no differences between boys and girls. Therefore, boys and girls should be given equal opportunities for reading, free selection of books, interactions with teachers, and encouragement and praise for reading.

As well, grade did not have a significant influence on reader self-perception, reading attitude, and children's perceptions of parental and peer expectations. This indicates that high ability students should be encouraged at all levels to continue with and expand their reading horizons. As children progress through elementary school, they may continue to read less challenging materials, particularly serial books, in an attempt to fit in with their peers. The onus is on teachers and parents to expose older elementary school children to a variety of reading materials and authors.

Children's perceptions of parental expectations have implications for both teachers and parents. Teachers should take time during group parent meetings as well as individual meetings to underscore the importance of encouragement and high expectations of parents for all students, including the high ability students. Too often teachers focus on the more demanding needs of weak and remedial readers, encouraging parents to take an active role in helping them at home. However, this study indicates that these high ability students believe that their parents find them to be good and capable readers. This belief must be nurtured in the students through home and school connections.

Modeling is also an important aspect which teachers can promote through work with parents. It is not enough to talk about the importance and value of reading; parents and teachers must model reading for enjoyment and information. The impact of significant others actually interacting with print in a meaningful way is likely to have more effect than lectures and lessons on the importance of reading.

Children's perceptions of peer expectations also have implications for educators. Although high ability students usually receive recognition and respect from their peers in elementary school, teachers feel the desire to fit with the group and not to receive extra attention grows as students progress through upper elementary grades into junior high. This may lead to a decrease in self-perception as a reader and a less positive reading attitude. For this reason, teachers must create and maintain classroom atmospheres that are conducive to risk-taking and sharing for all students. As well, high ability students must be challenged and rewarded for their accomplishments. Often they are employed as assistants in the classroom for those less able in reading and other areas. This changes the social balance with their peers and can contribute to negative social feedback from classmates

Students who are encouraged to read frequently and to read appropriate but challenging books are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward reading. Books must be interesting, and at the elementary level, there must be a large variety of topics and genres available to the students. As well, students must receive tangible praise and rewards linked to their reading performance. These can include extrinsic rewards such as



reading conferences, stickers and privileges, as well as intrinsic rewards such as improved scores in tests and assignments.

Children must also be given the foundation for building strong reader self-perceptions since reader self-perception is related to success in reading, as well as feedback from parents and teachers. Students should have opportunity to measure their progress with others in the class, in a non-competitive way, but more importantly, there must be a tangible, easily understood record keeping system to show students their own progress. Measuring one's progress is a strong contributor to positive reader self-perception.

Strategic reading instruction has a place in this cycle and in the elementary grade classroom. Although students are considered to be readers when they leave the primary grades, many students still require direct instruction in reading as well as reminders of effective reading strategies and habits. Teachers cannot assume that practice in reading, without guidance and instruction, will allow average or struggling readers to reach their potential. Those who have experienced success will continue to demonstrate strong reading abilities. Those who have not experienced success and have not mastered a number of strategies for reading will continue to require instruction and encouragement to become strong readers.

The role of parents is also clear here. All students should receive support and encouragement from their parents in a home environment where reading is respected, modeled and enjoyed. As well, children need to hear the message from their parents that

they are good readers who are continuing to improve with instruction and practice. The connections between reading in school and reading in everyday life must also be made with children. This is an important implication for teachers conducting parent evenings and meetings.

Finally, there are implications here for the creation of the classroom atmosphere. Certainly the availability of books at varying levels and for a wide variety of interests is important. As well, teachers need to establish ground rules with the students about supporting the reading attempts of others and how peers can give supportive feedback. Students who choose books other than those well-known and popular amongst their classmates are teased for their choices. This teasing can be directed at both the struggling reader who requires easier reading selections, and the high ability student, who may be reading books at a higher reading level, or with more mature themes, than the rest of the class. This type of teasing is subtle and teachers may not be aware of it in their classrooms. However, it can be devastating to the self-concept development of weaker readers and high ability readers.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

The following suggestions for further research evolved from this study.

1. This study was conducted with a group of high ability elementary level language arts students. It would be beneficial to repeat this study with a heterogeneous group of students.

2. This study could be repeated with students who are labeled 'gifted' or 'exceptionally able' to determine whether the same variables are significantly related.
3. A study could be designed and conducted to determine causality among relationships. Although it was shown in this study that there is a relationship between reading attitude and reader self-perception, the relationship needs to be clarified.
4. Two of the variables in this study were very similar in definition. Physiological states, one of the reader self-perception constructs, and reading attitude seem to be used interchangeably in some of the research reviewed. As well, similarity in some of the items on the questionnaires regarding physiological states and reading attitude indicate some overlap.
5. A closer examination of factors contributing to children's perceptions of peer expectations would allow educators to structure classrooms and class protocol to enhance peer feedback, reading attitude and reader self-perception for all students.
6. An investigation of these same variables in high ability students at higher grade levels would indicate whether these findings are typical of high ability students throughout school or if major changes do occur as they grow and progress in school. This could provide a developmental profile of students. This knowledge might allow educators to address the needs of more high ability students before they begin junior and senior high, where teachers perceive that the need for support and encouragement for these students sometimes decreases.

7 Further research into the role of the parent and the most effective ways to help parents develop and model strong reader self-perceptions and reading attitudes would be useful to the area of reading

8 Students' perceptions of teacher expectations can be explored as a further aspect of social feedback. This would give teachers specific information about approaches and attitudes that may be beneficial in the classroom.

9 The Reader Self-Perception Scale is a relatively new instrument available for measuring reader self-perception. The value of this scale to the classroom teacher could be explored and recommendations for its use within the regular, remedial and special education classrooms could be made

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Gina Pink  
P.O. Box 8250  
Manuels, Nf  
A1X 1A7

October 10, 1995

Dr. Walter Okshevsky  
Chairperson  
Ethical Review Committee  
Faculty of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's, Nf

Dear Dr. Okshevsky:

In order to complete the requirements for the Masters Degree programme in Curriculum and Instruction at Memorial University of Newfoundland, I wish to conduct a study with five groups of elementary level enrichment students in the Avalon Consolidated School District this autumn. The study is designed to test the interrelationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, gender and grade in high ability elementary level language arts students. In order to establish any correlations among these variables, it will be necessary to administer two simple surveys: the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the Reader Self-Perception Survey. Written consent will be required from the parent(s) or guardian(s) to permit their child to participate in the study.

Please find enclosed a copy of my research proposal, the parental consent form, testing materials, as well as other correspondence required for the investigation.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Gina Pink

## Appendix B

P.O. Box 8250  
Manuels, NF  
A1X 1A7

Mr. Gerald Coombs  
Assistant Superintendent  
Avalon Consolidated School Board  
P.O. Box 1980  
St. John's, NF  
A1C 5R5

Dear Mr. Coombs:

I write to request permission to carry out a study for the collection of data for my M.Ed. thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am presently employed as an enrichment teacher(half-time) and remedial reading teacher(half-time) with this board.

I wish to conduct a study with five groups of elementary level enrichment students in the Avalon Consolidated School District this autumn. The study is designed to test the interrelationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, child's perceptions of parental and peer expectations, gender and grade in elementary level language arts enrichment students. Students will be identified for the study through the enrichment screening assesment that is administered across the district for grade three students. In order to establish any correlations among these variables, it will be necessary to administer two simple surveys: the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the Reader Self-Perception Survey. Each survey will require at a maximum twenty minutes of class time and will be administered by the itinerant enrichment teacher at the school.

Written consent will be required from the parent(s) or guardian(s) to permit their child to participate in the study. I have enclosed a copy of the parent/guardian consent form for your perusal.

All information gathered in this study is confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation is voluntary and the students or parents may withdraw at any time. This study has received approval from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee. The results of my study will be made available to you upon request.

My supervisor is Dr. Joan Matchim. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with this study please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development.

If you have any concerns or questions about this request, please contact me at central office or at home (834-4921). Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Gina Pink

## Appendix C

P.O. Box 8250  
Manuels, NF  
A1X 1A7

Principal  
School Address

Dear,

I write to request permission to carry out a study for the collection of data for my M.Ed. thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The study is designed to test the interrelationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, gender and grade in elementary level language arts enrichment students. In order to establish any correlations among these variables, it will be necessary to administer two simple surveys; the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the Reader Self-Perception Survey. Each survey will require at a maximum twenty minutes of enrichment class time and will be administered by the itinerant enrichment teacher at the school.

Written consent will be required from the parent(s) or guardian(s) to permit their child to participate in the study. I have enclosed a copy of the parent/guardian consent form for your perusal.

All information gathered in this study is confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation is voluntary and the students or parents may withdraw at any time. The results of my study will be made available to you upon request.

My supervisor is Dr. Joan Matchim. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with this study please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development.

If you have any concerns or questions about this request, please contact me at Central Office(754-0710) or at home(834-4921). Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Gina Pink

## Appendix D

October 25, 1995

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s);

I am writing to request your permission for your child's participation in a study about reading. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University and an enrichment teacher with the Avalon Consolidated School Board. The study investigates the relationships among reader self-concept, reading attitude, reading comprehension, children's concepts of parental and peer expectations, gender and grade with elementary level language arts students.

In order to collect information about these variables I need to administer two surveys to the students in language arts enrichment groups. These surveys are the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the Reader Self-Perception Survey. These surveys will help determine your child's attitude toward reading, self-concept as a reader and how he or she thinks you and his or her peers see him or a her as a reader

Each survey will take about fifteen minutes. They will be administered by the enrichment teacher in the enrichment class. Your child will be asked to circle the response which best describes how he or she feels about reading. Each question will be read aloud twice. For the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, the response choices will include four poses of Garfield, the cartoon character cat, depicting very happy to very sad expressions. For the Reader Self-Perception Survey, the response choices include Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation is voluntary and you or your child may withdraw at any time. This study has received approval from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee and the Avalon Consolidated School Board. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at 754-0710 (day) or 834-4921 (evening). My supervisor at Memorial University is Dr Joan Oldford-Matchim. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with this study please contact Dr Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development.

If you are in agreement with having your child participate in this study please sign the permission section below and return it to the enrichment teacher. I would appreciate it if you would please return it by the next enrichment day.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Gina Pink

I \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian) hereby give permission for my child to take part in a study regarding the interrelationships among reader self-concept, attitude, reading comprehension, child's concept of parental and peer expectations, gender and grade with elementary level language arts students undertaken by Gina Pink. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that my child and/or I can withdraw permission at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_









